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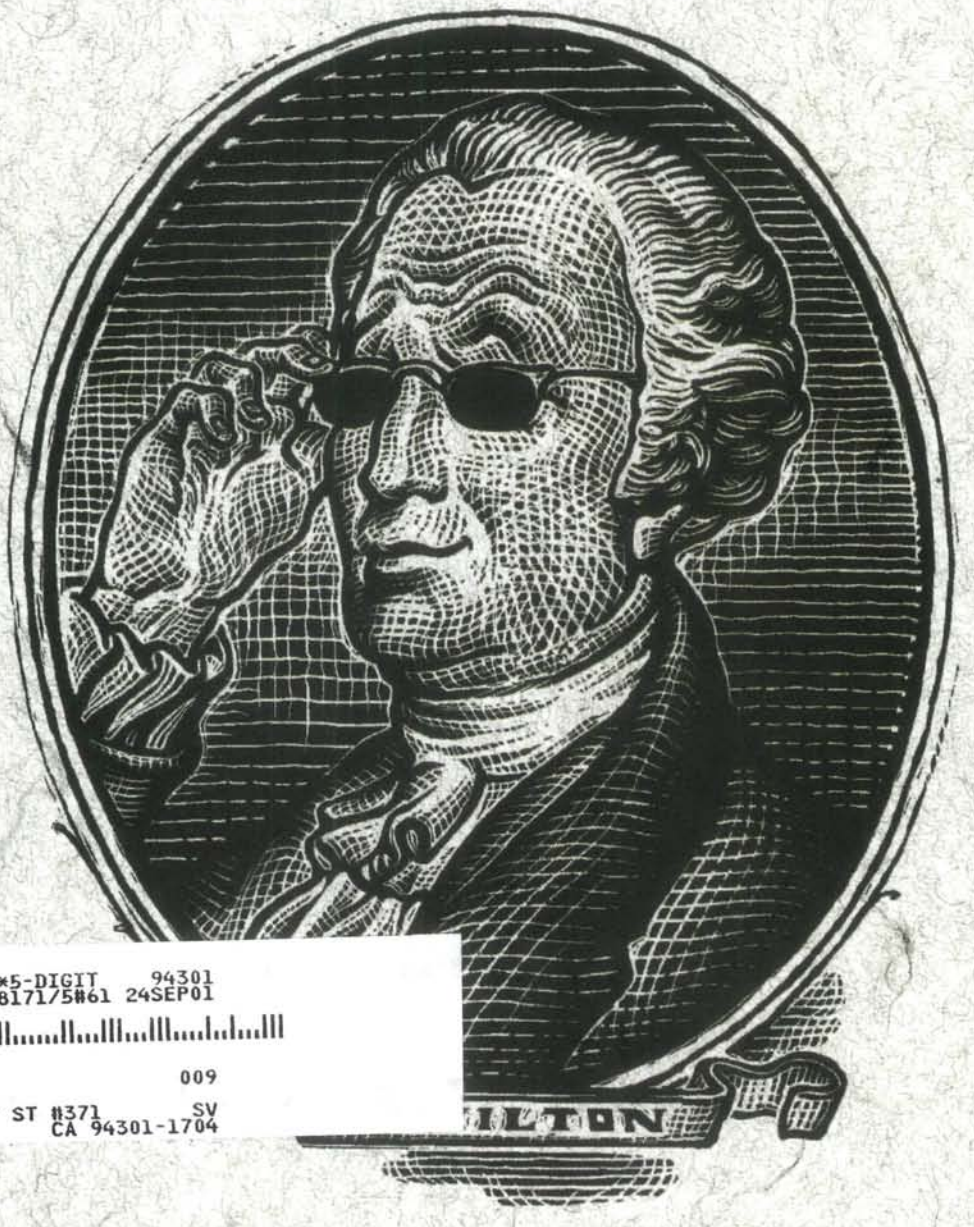

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Things Aren't As Great As They Seem

JOHN B. JUDIS • PAUL KRUGMAN

Yes, They Are

THE EDITORS

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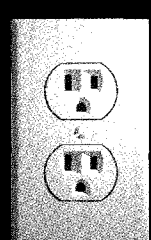

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NOVEMBER 3, 1997

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CORRESPONDENCE

Enchanted disenchantment

To the editors:

In Charles Lane's article, "Island of Disenchantment" (September 29), one suspects that the failure of democracy in Haiti fulfills a certain liberal tendency toward "benign despotism."

While we at the Clinton Investigative Commission obviously did not urge this administration to send troops to "nation-build" Haiti, neither do we want to throw away actual gains. Undoing their work means installing a bastardized regime and unifying both new and old Haitian elites mediated by a high-tech voodoo police state. Give the U.S. Armed Forces and the Clinton White House credit for at least making a ghastly situation into a bad one.

GEORGE PRIMBS
Annandale, Virginia

Mr. Toad's revenge

To the editors:

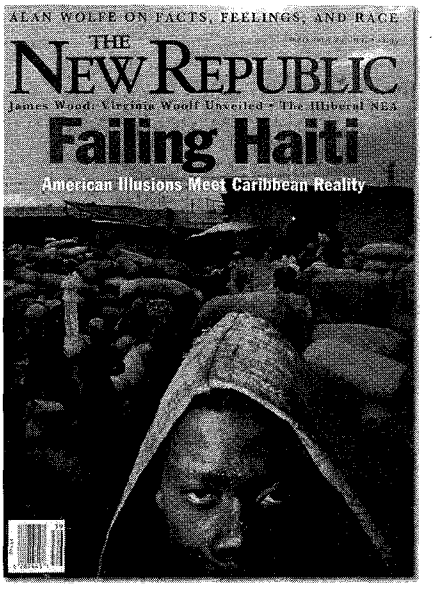
I am sure that all your fair-minded readers will have recognized Tony Judt's desperately one-sided outpouring against my book *Europe: A History* ("Crimes and Misdemeanors," September 22) for what it was. Unfortunately, many of the sensitive topics raised can be discussed only with restraint and respect, or not at all. Through his intemperance, Judt has forfeited his chance of a full response.

It is perfectly true that the first edition of *Europe: A History* (1996) found its way into print with too many factual errors and typos. On the other hand, one could equally have asked how many of the facts were accurate. Having checked numerous lists of queries from well-wishers, my own estimate of accuracy would be around 98 percent. But that is stale news. Judt fails to refer to the corrected edition (1997) that has been circulating since last May.

For some reason, Judt thinks that to be "pro-Polish" is an offense. He makes *Polonophilia* sound like a disease. In reality, he is sniping at a suspected "Pole-lover" in the same sarcastic way that prewar anti-Semites habitually denounced "Jew-lovers." The aim was to trash the reputation of anyone who did not share their own, hate-laden prejudices. Nowadays, such language is beyond the pale of civilized discourse.

Judt has no sane answer for the phalanx of over fifty reviewers worldwide who strongly disagree with him. British reviewers, he argues, are too terrified by the system of academic assessment to criticize me honestly. The editorial in the *Times*, which paid me some handsome compliments, is compensating for Britain's international decline. Britain's leading left-wing columnist, who voiced some criticisms but also called the book "a profound pleasure," is now put down as "pompous." A prominent right-wing colleague, a Jewish American, who praised the book fulsomely, oozes "aggression," "unpleasant suggestions," and "innuendoes." The professor of Modern European History at Cambridge University is a "disgraceful" dodger ... etc., etc. In the words of the Iron Duke, "If you believe that, you'll believe anything."

Judt's gravest mistake, however, lies in his dreadful misreading of *The Wind in*


ALAN WOLFE ON FACTS, FEELINGS, AND RACE
THE NEW REPUBLIC
James Wood: Virginia Woolf Unveiled • The Illiberal NEA
Failing Haiti
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the Willows. Contrary to what he thinks, it is not so unflattering to be juxtaposed with Mr. Toad. As all "W-W" fans know, "Toadie," though a wayward fellow, is dearly loved and stoutly defended by all his friends on the riverbank. The same cannot be said of the Chief Weasel. So I would simply remind Professor Judt of those fine concluding sentences about happier days to come:

> Sometimes, in the course of long summer evenings, the friends would take a stroll together in the Wild Wood, now successfully tamed...; and it was pleasing to see how respectfully they were greeted by the inhabitants, and how the mother weasels would bring their young ones to the mouths of their holes and say, pointing, 'Look, baby! There goes the great Mr. Toad! And that's the gallant Water Rat.... And yonder comes the famous Mr. Mole.' But when the infants were fractious and quite beyond control, they would quiet them by telling how ... the terrible grey Badger would up and get them.

NORMAN DAVIES
Oxford, England

To the editors:

Had Tony Judt actually read what I wrote about Norman Davies's *Europe: A History*, he would not have been able to claim that I "reviewed Davies's book three times," and with each review allowed my "aggression towards Davies's 'enemies'" to "grow fiercer." In fact, I reviewed the book once, in Britain, without mentioning any other reviews or reviewers. I was then asked to describe the critical storm over the book in an article in the *New Criterion*. That article was then purchased and reprinted, virtually word for word, by the British magazine *Prospect*, and credited to the *New Criterion*. Nowhere did I use the word "enemies" to describe Davies's critics, some of whom I agreed with, and since I only wrote about them once, I could not have allowed my "aggression" toward them to grow in successive articles. For someone like Mr. Judt, who claims to be concerned with accuracy and the level-headed reporting of facts, these are grave errors. Indeed, if anyone is showing "aggression" toward people he disagrees with, or deploying "innuendo" to discredit them—something of which he also accuses me—I am afraid it is he, as the rest of his review well demonstrates.

ANNE APPLEBAUM
London, England

To the editors:

I'm sorry Tony Judt didn't check with a musician before pronouncing Norman Davies, in his *Europe: A History*, "better on music" than he is on the history of art or ideas or economic development. I feel qualified to offer a comment on his knowledge of music, because he relied on my article about Mikhail Glinka's opera "A Life for the Tsar" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* for his "capsule" *Susanin*, like most of the capsules (as Judt notes) titled in a way that shows off the author's erudition in a manner calculated to mystify the reader. In the course of a page and a half, the composer's distant cousin Fyodor, a poet, becomes his brother, the genre of "rescue opera" is misdefined, the familiar dance form *polonaise* is pointlessly Russianized to *polonez* (the Russian word for it is *pol'skiy*), and my translation of a text quatrain is seriously garbled.

Most seriously of all, Davies mischaracterizes the opera (in keeping with his customary Polonocentrism) as a direct response to the Polish Rising of 1830-31, whereas it was actually composed years later for the purpose of canonizing the Romanov dynasty and its recently promulgated doctrine of official nationalism. (True, Poles are caricatured in it, but the reasons were different and clearly set forth in the article.)

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So Davies is no more dependable, or savory, here than elsewhere.

RICHARD TARUSKIN
El Cerrito, California

To the editors:

After showing numerous instances of tendentious reasoning in Norman Davies's dubious account of the Holocaust and of modern Jewish history more generally, Tony Judt nonetheless concludes that since Davies "insists ... he is not anti-Semitic," on *this* "we must take him at his word." Why?

BEREL LANG
Hartford, Connecticut

Snobbism obscured

To the editors:

Having long admired Robert Brustein, I was unsurprised to find his pro-NEA screed so brilliant and judicious ("Mend It, Don't End It," October 6). I was therefore unusually disenchanted by his reference to Miller Williams as "an obscure poetaster from Arkansas." To call any of us poets "obscure" is redundant; we are only more obscure or less so in the eyes of the general public. Few of us who actually write and read poems, however, would apply such an adjective to Mr. Williams. Of course, critical tastes vary. But not even a dyspathetic critic would call the erudite Williams a "poetaster." Brustein does so, I'd wager without ever reading a book by the man he savages. Such sloth and ignorance derive from plain Harvardian snobbism: Mr. Williams is "from Arkansas"; ergo he can't be other than second-rate. You'd think a smart guy like Brustein could rise above this Northeastern condescension.

SYDNEY LEA
Newbury, Vermont

Robert Brustein replies:

I apologize to Sydney Lea, indeed to all poets, for the condescending word "obscure." But having read some of Miller Williams's poems, I could not understand why he, rather than more deserving poets, was honored by the president, unless it was because they shared certain geographical roots. This, rather than any Northeastern bias, accounted for my reference to Arkansas. By the way, my lamentable snobbism long predates my tenure at Harvard.

Testy

To the editors:

National testing is one of those "fixes" that sounds good but, in reality, serves no useful purpose ("Getting Testy," September 29). Centralized testing creates a situation where one person, or a group of people, decides what everyone should learn. This isolates the test-maker from the test-taker. Standardized tests are seldom reliable; and federal and state programs that start out as voluntary almost always end up being coercive or mandated.

National testing was a bad idea when the Republicans thought of it and it's still a bad idea on the part of the Democrats.

WARREN L. RIPLEY
Knob Noster, Missouri

It's all in the negatives

To the editors:

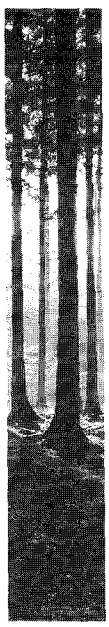
Hanna Rosin suggests in her Diarist ("Photo Negative," October 6) that older Germans leave an exhibit of Leni Riefenstahl's photos in a "sympathetic and nostalgic mood" not because they have fond memories of Hitler but because they recall a time when "an artist could show uncensored, guilt-free beauty."

You have to be truly obsessed with "political correctness" to see *Triumph of the Will* as a refreshing alternative.

KATHA POLLITT
New York, New York

Thinking Ecologically

The Next Generation of Environmental Policy



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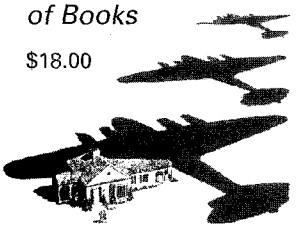

Barry Goldwater

Robert Alan Goldberg

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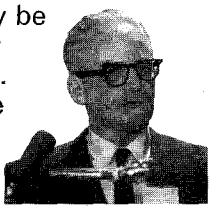

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FROM WASHINGTON

Degree of separation

For decades at Cornell University, minority students have opted out of regular dorms and into ethnic theme houses. Last year, Cornell's president proposed changing that slightly: students should wait to enter the Ujamaa house or the Latino Living Center until after their freshman year. The response? Fifteen undergrads went on a hunger strike, hundreds laid down in the street, and Reverend Al Sharpton dropped in to accuse the administration of trying to make black and Latino students "merge in with everyone else so we don't know they're here."

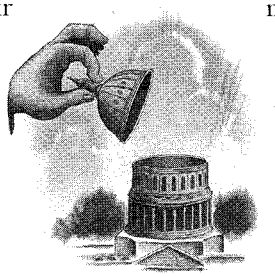
This is the kind of thing that gives conservative critics of political correctness a reason to get up in the morning. And it occasioned the usual shoutfest about diversity, forced integration, and self-segregation—followed by a weak-kneed administration compromise.

So far, so predictable. But right-wing outrage over separatism at Cornell raises an interesting question: Why on Earth are conservatives supporting the five Orthodox Jewish students who won't live in the regular dormitories at Yale? The answer is one of the ironies of the culture war: when it comes to religion, the real multiculturalists are all on the Right.

The Yale case and the Cornell case are essentially the same. It's true that the Yalies are asking to move off campus, but that's only because Yale doesn't have specialty houses. If it had a single sex dorm, or a "no-premarital sex" dorm, the Orthodox five would live there. And it's true that the Cornell radicals say they're fleeing racism while the Yale faithful say they're fleeing condoms. But it amounts to the same thing. Yale freshman Elisha Dov Hack's older brother told him that dorm life has made previous Orthodox students less observant. Hunger-striking black senior Dana Miller told *The New York Times* last year that Cornell's proposed change was "an attempt to socialize students into a homogeneous group." Hack and Miller are both really fleeing assimilation.

That's why it's so remarkable that champions of the melting pot like Charles Krauthammer, William Buckley, Kate O'Beirne, and the editors of *The Weekly Standard* have risen to the Yale Five's defense. This, after all, is the same Charles Krauthammer who recently decried "the tragic turn towards black separatism," and the same *Standard* which in September coined the phrase, "diversity gulag."

Conservative views about separatism, it turns out, depend on who's doing the separating. Consider these words, written in September by frequent *National Review* contributor Jacob Neusner: "cripples have their ramps, homosexuals their K-Y dispensers and double beds, blacks their ghettos, Hispanics their barrios, voyeurs their unisex toilets, all courtesy of university housing directors. But rather than extend the same 'sensitivity' to scarcely a minyan—a quorum—of Orthodox Jews, Yale would rather humiliate itself." This tasteful nugget gets to the heart of the issue. All this time everyone thought conservatives opposed "ghettos" and "barrios" on principle. But now it turns out they're just mad that P.C. radicals get them and prudish believers do not.



A good example of this multicultural me-tooism is the Right's support for charter schools. On August 16, 1996, *The Washington Times* called the accreditation of charter schools in the District of Columbia a "ray of hope." Three and a half months later, the principal of the Afrocentric Marcus Garvey Public Charter School assaulted a *Washington Times* reporter. A *Times* commentator, Ernest Lefever, called the attack "the latest in a long string of outrages committed in the name of multiculturalism."

He's right, but the *Times* was asking for it. Multiculturalism isn't just the ideology of the Marcus Garvey charter school, it's the ideology of charter schools, period. Charter schools are based on the idea that communities should be able to fashion their own institutions with minimal interference from outsiders. They represent a rejection of the principle that public schools should educate all students in a common curriculum or a common culture. That is why Michael Kelly wrote in this space last December that charter schools "take from the pluribus to destroy the unum." In their mania for local autonomy, conservative educational reformers have recreated the publicly funded black nationalist schools that arose in late 1960s New York under radical chic Mayor John Lindsey—most notoriously in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn.

Their motivation, of course, is different. For liberals, multiculturalism offered emancipation from racial oppression; for conservatives, it's about religion. Charter schools, combined with vouchers for private and parochial schools, and subsidies for home schooling, constitute the multiculturalist Right's assault on a common school system. Many Christian conservatives believe that regular public schools promote an immoral, godless ideology. Like the Orthodox Jews at Yale, they want to separate—and take their money with them. And just as liberals are instinctively (sometimes mindlessly) sympathetic to demands made in the name of anti-racism, secular conservatives jump to defend the beleaguered faithful. In so doing, they end up supporting a multiculturalism of their own.

Once upon a time, liberals and conservatives believed in Norman Podhoretz's "brutal bargain." Assimilation was hard and even demeaning, but it bought you entrance into a common American culture. That didn't mean the culture was static; over time it might absorb a bit of your particular ethos. But you pushed from the inside, conscious that you could not both reject assimilation and expect its fruits.

In the 1960s, the Left decided this model wouldn't work for blacks. It believed, naïvely, that African Americans could remain separate from whites while making ever greater moral claims on them. The result, of course, was a tremendous backlash, as working-class whites learned how to stake the claims of identity themselves.

As conservatives line up behind their own brand of separatism, they should take care not to be similarly naïve. The options are these: you either commit to common institutions, and accept the old, painful disjuncture between home and school, or you accept marginality. It is a far different thing to call for prayer in public schools than it is to demand that the citizenry fund religious schools. And it is a far different thing to participate fully in a university while maintaining your identity than it is to expect a university to accept you fully while refusing to give yourself fully to it. If conservatives really cared about the Yale Five, they would tell them what they told the hunger-strikers at Cornell: assimilation is the American way.

PETER BEINART

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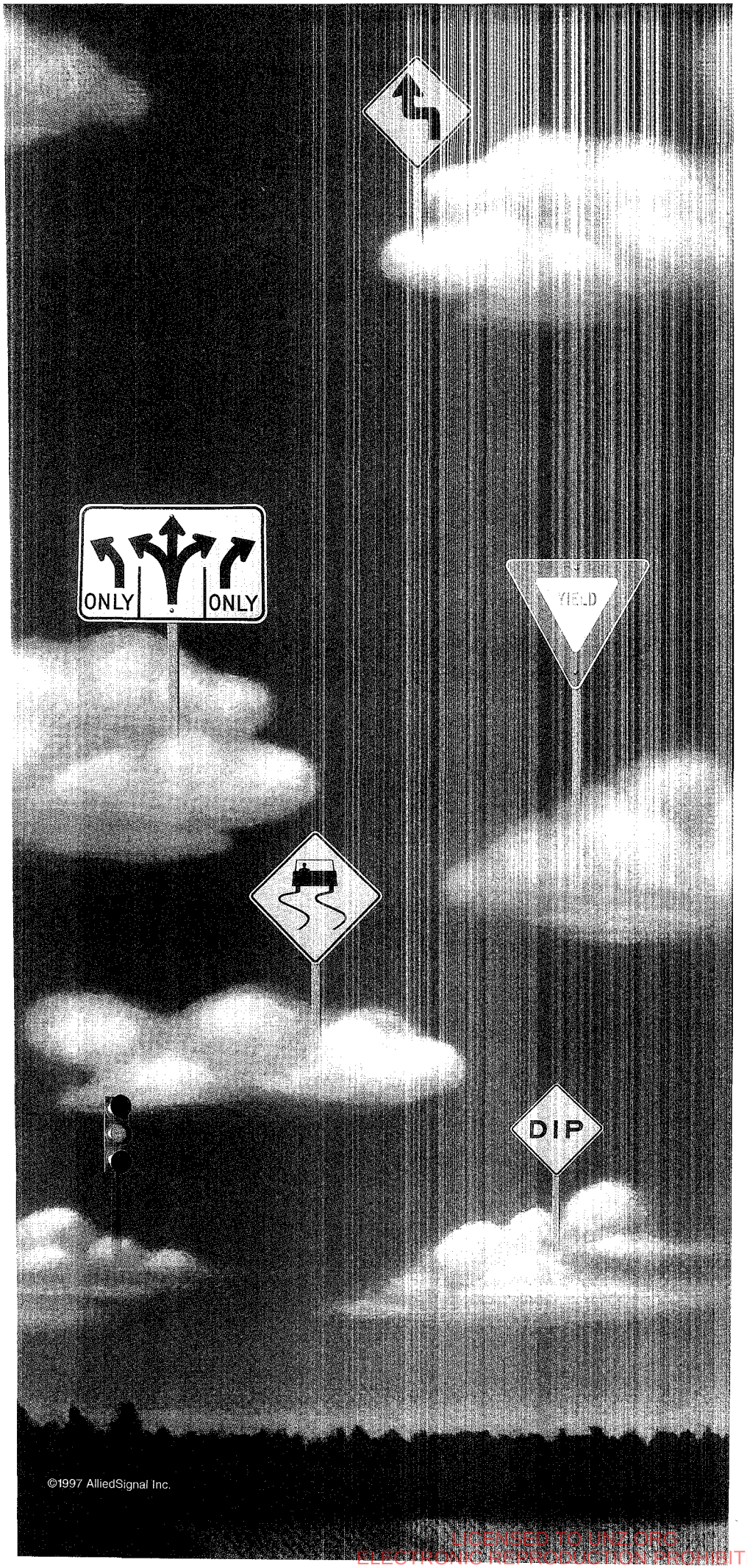

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

NOVEMBER 3, 1997

SHUT UP AND SMILE

Pity poor America. It is suffering from a glut of good news. Now that everything is going swimmingly, from welfare reform to lower crime rates to a booming stock market, the new cause for concern is prosperity itself. All this success must be breeding trouble. The stock market's so high that its crash will be monumental. Reduced crime has diverted attention from the need to deal with crime's roots, and so we're doing nothing about the coming wave of violent pubescents. The lack of an international threat has left us inattentive to China's growing menace.

We hate to rob everyone of the time-honored pleasure of bemoaning America's imminent meltdown—Charles Dickens once sarcastically observed that America "always *is* depressed, and always *is* stagnated, and always *is* at an alarming crisis"—but, alas, it's time to gloat. Despite all the carping about America's economic weaknesses, the United States has become the envy of the world. The French still make fun of Americans, but they're the ones stuck with double-digit unemployment. Even Germany's traditionally anti-American magazine *Der Spiegel* recently hailed New York on its cover for its idyllic quality of life. President Clinton is presiding over what will be seen in future decades as a golden age in American history.

One of the most remarkable drops has come in the crime rate. Five years ago everyone believed that high crime was the American way, a pathology lodged incorrigibly in the national soul. Now Los Angeles has fewer burglaries than Sydney, Australia. The most startling turnaround, of course, has come in New York City, where there has been a 50 percent drop in the crime rate since 1990 and a 63 percent drop in the murder rate. There are many explanations for this fall, from better community policing to demographic cycles. Another, though, is simply prosperity. The stagflation of the 1970s—the one-two punch of high unemployment and inflation—has finally vanished. Thanks to former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, who managed to wring inflation out of the economy and save us from the worst effects of the Reagan deficits, we now have the reverse: a buoyant economy with low inflation and low unemployment. Call it the Prozac economy.

The effects of the Prozac economy are more than hallucinatory. With the booming economy, tax revenues for both the state and federal government have soared; income taxes at the federal level were up over 20 percent. Federal spending, apart from outlays for interest, are down to 17.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product—the lowest level since 1966. Many projections show that the onerous federal deficit will be eliminated by next year.

It's not just government that's feeling flush. According to the Commerce Department, personal household income has recently begun to pick up, rising six-tenths of a percent in June. And remember that other great American bugaboo: we don't save. Well, saving is up. The national savings rate has gone from 3.6 cents out of each dollar earned to 3.8 cents. GDP growth has averaged over 3 percent a quarter, while the Producer Price Index, which measures what manufacturers actually charge retailers for their goods, has been declining steadily. The inflation rate itself, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, is now hovering at over 2 percent annually, while unemployment is below 5 percent.

Still determined to rain on the parade, declinists have returned to an old faithful bogeyman from the '80s: the trade deficit. But there are several problems with this doom and gloom. One is that American exports have actually increased 24 percent since last fall, a boost that makes up close to half of the overall growth in the American economy since then. This is a fact that protectionists don't like to dwell on. Moreover, the main reason the U.S. is running a considerable trade deficit is because Americans are flush with funds. Since the U.S. economy is booming, we can afford to buy more imports than our major trading partners. The U.S. trade deficit with Japan has, in fact, risen from

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$4 billion in June to $5.2 billion in July.

The doomsayers claim that trade deficits will drain capital, leading to a recession and higher interest rates. Yet the exact opposite has occurred. The dollar has reached its highest levels in a decade against the Deutsche mark and the yen without cutting into American exports. American interest rates remain below 6 percent. John B. Judis warns on page 22 that our imbalanced relationship with Japan means that they can wreak havoc with our currency by threatening to sell our T-bills. But the truth is that the Japanese are just as hostage to this arrangement as are we. It's the financial version of mutually assured destruction.

Far from being a ninety-eight-pound weakling in the international arena, the U.S. is poised to dominate international markets. While the Southeast Asian tigers are self-immolating and Europe follows the fool's gold of monetary union, American companies are prospering. As the October 10 *Financial Times* pointed out, "this is merely the start of the era of U.S. corporate influence around the world." Thirty of the 100 biggest multinational companies are American. American companies command the lead in industries ranging from pharmaceuticals to computer software. Indeed, one of the reasons that the U.S. stock market has been roaring is the conviction among investors that American companies will drub the competition.

But hold on a minute, the skeptics say, what about inequality? There's no denying that in the last decade it has increased. But thanks to a balanced budget and an economic boom, we may actually be able to reverse this trend, too. When Bill Clinton and Robert Reich took office in 1993 proposing to pour money into retraining the working class to compete in the international economy, they were informed that all available revenue had to be devoted to taming the runaway deficit. Now, for the first time in years, we can responsibly talk about spending more money on discrete programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit. We can also realize perhaps the most fundamental lesson of the last decades: that the best anti-poverty program is a thriving economy. Which is exactly what we have now, and why we're entitled, God forbid, to smirk a little. •

NOTEBOOK

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME: No concrete evidence is available yet, but all the circumstantial evidence indicates that sometime last summer somebody put something in Scandinavian water. The circumstantial evidence to which we refer, of course, is the Nobel prizes for 1997. We have no way to judge, at this notoriously unscientific magazine, whether the "prions" for which Stanley B. Prusiner won the prize for medicine really exist; and so we must give the controversial neurologist's genetically indifferent but otherwise infectious proteins the benefit of the doubt. But the prize for literature went to Dario Fo, who has not produced anything remotely resembling literature. He is merely a performance artist *avant la lettre*, whose antic, savage monologues owe their celebrity to their trite left-wing politics. Nothing like being denied a visa by the United States government to make a writer immortal. And Dario Fo has satirized Catholicism: what courage! Salman Rushdie has satirized Islam, of course, and he is a real writer; but the graybeards in Stockholm are not about to offend *those* believers. We used to fret that the Nobel committee would one day lose the rest of its marbles and announce that they have chosen the often short-listed Joyce Carol Oates; but now we look forward to the awarding of the Nobel prize for literature in 1998 to Anna Deveare Smith. Then there was the prize for peace, which went to Diana, Princess of Wales ... sorry, to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and to Jody Williams, who strode unshod onto the world stage as one of the most self-righteous Americans in recent memory, which is saying something. Williams promptly denounced the president of the United States as a "weenie," as a man "who does not want to be on the side of humanity," because he refuses to concede that the question of landmines must be addressed not only from the standpoint of morality, but also from the standpoint of security; and also region by region. In Korea, these otherwise disgusting devices are merely preventing a major war. But a war in Korea is a prospect that Williams has been able to abide. What she has not been able to abide were the wars in Vietnam in the 1960s and in Nicaragua in the 1980s. All in all, judging by her rhetoric, it seems fair to say that the Nobel committee has at long last done the right thing and honored the worldview of Country Joe and the Fish. And then, just as we were about to draw a political conclusion about the college of Swedish and Norwegian progressives, they go ahead and bestow the Nobel medal in economics on two professors whose contribution to their field was (according to *The New York Times*) "helping devise a mathematical formula that provided the answer to a simple but seemingly insurmountable problem confronting Wall Street: how to measure the worth of an option." The value of a call option, you see, equals the expected stock price minus the expected cost of exercising the option, or

$$C = SN(d) - Le^{-rt}N(d - \sigma\sqrt{t})$$

This will help investors with futures, derivatives, and insurance policies, too. Neat! But a Nobel? A gala dinner at the Bohemian Grove, yes. But a Nobel? It looks to us like the Swedish judges are the weenies. They just don't have the guts to give the thing to Warren Buffett.

FASHION SHEIK: It was to be expected that the return of Sheik Ahmed Yassin to Gaza would pro-

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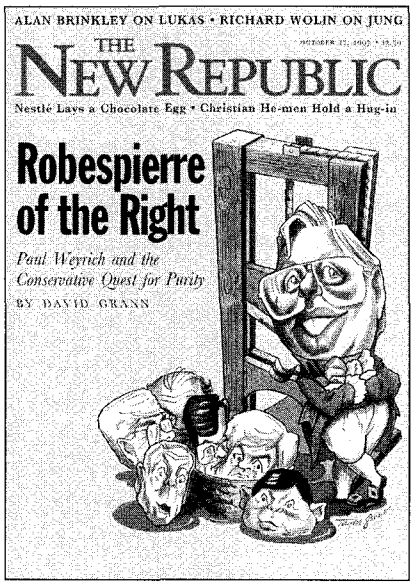
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Robespierre of the Right
Paul Weyrich and the Conservative Quest for Purity
BY DAVID GRANN

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voke raptures among the Hamas masses, but the celebration by Palestinians in Nablus took an especially macabre turn. The Associated Press reported that "Hamas activists dressed as suicide bombers..., white death shrouds covering their heads and fake explosives lining their belts," marched here to celebrate the release of their leader. "Eight activists marched with red headbands tied over white hoods to symbolize blood. Another eight, representing Hamas gunmen, wore military fatigues, masked their faces and swung fake assault rifles made of wood." The Palestinian carnivalesque! Benjamin Netanyahu's stupidity in Amman cannot be denied, but the costume party in Nablus is a reminder that there are things worse than stupidity.

FIFTY-FIFTY: Judging by the newsmagazines, America is about to mark a historical milestone. October 26, says *Time*, will be a day "that almost compels any woman to step back and examine whether the drape and line of her life fit the woman she once dreamed of becoming." Why October 26? Because it is Hillary Rodham Clinton's birthday, and She is Everywoman. This week, *Time*, which put Brad Pitt on the cover of last week's issue and pretended that it was an issue about Buddhism, features a long valentine to the First Lady that sets a new low in the contemporary confusion of political commentary with celebrity puffery. But the really droll stuff is in *Newsweek's* more modest birthday card. "Internal White House polls," we read, "show her at practically her highest level (around 60 percent) since coming to office." Hold on. *Mrs.* Clinton did not come to office. *Mr.* Clinton did. But that is not how Mrs. Clinton sees it. "'I'm much more aware and much more comfortable with the Bully Pulpit,' she told *Newsweek*." But that is not *her* pulpit, it is *his* pulpit. Hillary Rodham Clinton may be an Amazon, but she is not the president. It appears that the lessons she has learned do not include the lesson of humility. *Newsweek* reports that the First Lady will celebrate her birthday in Chicago with "visits to her childhood haunts. 'All the stations of the cross,' says a friend." A friend?

FUND-RAISING PIETY WATCH: "Probably the biggest scandal in the history of the Republic," Senator Bob Smith recently told *The Boston Globe* with regard to the administration's initial failure to hand over video tapes of White House coffee klatches. The New Hampshire Republican and member of the Senate Ethics Committee rattled off a slew of scandals to make his case, but what he failed to mention was that he had forked over nearly $100,000 for exceeding New Hampshire's $1 million spending cap during the 1996 election. "If you stop and think about it," he said, "and look carefully and fairly, this administration is one of the most corrupt in American history." He should know. •

A little plutonium never hurt.

NO FREE LAUNCH

By Stephen Glass

Although for most Americans space travel has become about as ho-hum as Star Trek reruns, there are still a few people out there who get really worked up over NASA launches: conspiracy theorists, UFO chasers, prospective lunar colonists, just to name a few. And every once in a while, some of them descend onto Florida's Kennedy Space Center to stage protests—like the one by Mars enthusiasts, who thought NASA had shot down a U.S. satellite to conceal an enormous human face on the red planet's surface, carved by Martians living in a pyramid city.

But when it comes to sheer originality, last week's protest against the launch of Cassini—a plutonium-powered satellite that will orbit Saturn—may be the best of all. Rally organizers say thousands of environmentalists protested the Saturn probe by *not* demonstrating outside the space center. That's right. To show how fearful they were that the satellite's plutonium battery would blow up and rain radioactive particles on Florida, the protesters stayed home. This, of course, has made it very difficult to measure the actual size of the rally. "We showed them how dangerous it is. At some times, the place was as empty as a graveyard," boasted Ryan Hogin, a Montana anti-Cassini activist. "The experts are saying tens of thousands protested—I'd say it was close to 100,000 that stayed home ... maybe more."

You might not know it from quotes like that, but Hogin is a grass-roots organizer in what has become the most effective anti-space movement in more than a decade. Over the past few months, top environmental activists and anti-nuclear scientists have whipped skittish skywatchers around the country into a panic about nuclear fallout from Cassini. Western Union now has a "stop the Cassini hotline" (1-888-NO-CASSINI), which forwards anti-Cassini telegrams to the White House for $10 a pop. Massachusetts passed a resolution against Cassini, Baltimore Mayor Kurt Shmoke initially attacked the probe even though many NASA employees live in Maryland, and Las Vegas is even taking bets on whether it will malfunction. (The approximate odds before liftoff: 1 in 70.)

While efforts to scrap Cassini officially failed when the rocket was successfully launched last week, the activists remain undaunted. And they have found an unexpected ally in House Republicans. At $3.4 billion, Cassini is NASA's most expensive mission ever to another planet. (The probe will map the surface of Saturn and send a

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lander to one of its moons.) Last week, some Republicans said they planned to ask for an investigation and, in the interim, ground plutonium-powered satellites. NASA says such a move would be crippling because without plutonium, it can't get to the outer solar system and would have to scratch several missions planned for the next decade. But this hasn't moved the Republicans, who at last have found a way to improve the environment by cutting spending. (Supply-side environmentalism!) "We are deeply concerned that if a space mission puts the world at a health risk," says one Republican Science Committee staffer. "When it comes to this frontier, the government should be safe, not sorry."

There are, in fact, some serious and respected scientists who share the skepticism about plutonium-powered probes. But it seems unlikely that Cassini, or something like it, could really shower the world with radiation. Cassini opponents believe this probe could blow up one of two times: first, when it was launched (that didn't happen, needless to say); or second, when it passes Earth again in 1999. But according to NASA's environmental risk study, there is only a tiny chance that Cassini could actually get sucked into the Earth's atmosphere in 1999. "I don't want those odds," Hogin told me and several Florida television stations. "[It's a] high risk when losing means a global downpour of nuclear radiation."

Well, sure. But the study does not say there is a minute chance of a plutonium shower. That's only the odds Cassini will reenter Earth's atmosphere. Even if it were to get sucked in, there is only a one in a million shot that plutonium will be released. The radioactive battery that contains the plutonium is sealed within three cases of graphite—the first of which can endure five falls through our atmosphere before burning up. According to NASA astronomers, the battery would have to fall to Earth, then get launched back into space, and then drop down again about a dozen times to burn off the graphite.

Even if, somehow, plutonium from a Cassini-like probe did escape, the health risk to earthlings would be infinitesimal. The plutonium is designed not to vaporize but to break into marshmallow-sized pellets, each with a harmless metal coating. In this state, NASA says, the plutonium can even be touched, all of which puts the likelihood of Hogin's receiving a deadly dose of radiation at somewhere around one in several billion—or lower than the odds that he or anybody else will get hit by an asteroid. "That's asking for a real lot of bad luck," says Stephen Edberg, a NASA astronomer on the project.

But the most disingenuous claim the activists make is about the potential health impact of fall-out. According to a leaflet handed out at an Orlando rally, if the plutonium falls to earth, "it is likely that a substantial portion of the next generation would have genetic deformations." But, even as Republicans take up the protest on Capitol Hill, NASA credibly notes that the U.S. government has released "thousands" of pounds of plutonium into the atmosphere for nuclear tests, while Cassini carries just over 72 pounds. That's not much to get worked up over. No wonder everybody stayed home. •

The House hearings turn (gasp) nice.

BEAST OF BURTON

By Hanna Rosin

What a gloriously low-rent place is the United States House of Representatives! No amount of grooming can hide the body's relative shabbiness: you'll spot a finely tailored jacket, and then the sleeve will ride up to reveal frayed cuffs; the jacket is removed, and out pops a satin tie, barely covering a lunch stain. You get the impression congressmen would wear short sleeve work shirts if they could. Even the lettuce seems to wilt more quickly in the Rayburn cafeteria than in the dining quarters of America's upper house.

The squalor was on rich display during the first week of the House hearings on the campaign finance scandal. The Senate hearings are held in a grand high-tech showroom: a creamy marble wall serves as a backdrop for the dozens of cameramen who film from levitating skyboxes; meanwhile, the more grounded reporter types rest their notebooks on oak tables long enough to seat about forty each. The press section for the House hearings is as big as the average office cubicle. Reporters are so close to the members' desks they can see the hair on Congressman Bernie Sanders's hand. The Senate hearings are presided over by Fred Thompson, with his fine conqueror's head and his baritone voice; the House has Dan Burton, famously paranoid, bitterly partisan, with a pipsqueak voice and skin the color of raw meat.

Burton has more than the average House member's quirks. A former insurance salesman, the Indiana Republican is best remembered in his fifteen-year House career for two acts: sponsoring a bill requiring *every* American to get tested for HIV, and shooting what's now described as a "head-like" object, to gain clues into Vince Foster's "suspicious death." (A DNC underling stood outside the hearing room dressed as a pumpkin, wearing buttons that pleaded "DON'T SHOOT.") Even after Kenneth Starr released his report last week concluding Foster's death was a suicide, Burton said he still had "some reservations."

Like most paranoiacs, Burton prefers his own kind. This preference has practical drawbacks. In July, Burton's chief counsel, John Rowley, quit, complaining in his letter of resignation about the "unrelenting, self-promoting" behavior of David Bossie, the committee's investigative coordinator and a famous Clinton obsessive. Two other staff members followed Rowley, leaving in charge two prosecutors not yet 30, with four years prosecuting experience between them. (Dick Bennett, the new chief counsel, took over just weeks before the hearings started.)

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Then news began to trickle out that Burton had his own cast of shady foreign friends—lobbyists for Zaire, Pakistan, Turkey, Guatemala—whose causes he sometimes promoted on the House floor. He eventually returned money to a Zaire lobbyist and a Sikh temple. When asked about the lapses, Burton responded like Clinton with "as far as I know" and "I can't say never."

But once the hearings started, a strange thing happened. Burton has been practicing for months to keep his temper in check, and it worked. The presiding magistrate of the people's court gave a performance worthy of Judge Wapner; he cut through the babble, and synthesized a convincingly squalid narrative, without once raising his voice. The unwieldy number of congressmen had the reverse of the expected effect. It made it possible to ignore forty-two of them, and concentrate on the two that mattered, Burton and ranking member Henry Waxman.

From the opening day, Burton distinguished himself from the riffraff. He gave a decent opening speech, marked by controlled anger and a clarity of detail some of his more windy colleagues failed to achieve. Most of them told jokes, or sputtered, or said little at all. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican from Florida, prepared a little ditty, sung to the tune of "Copacabana."

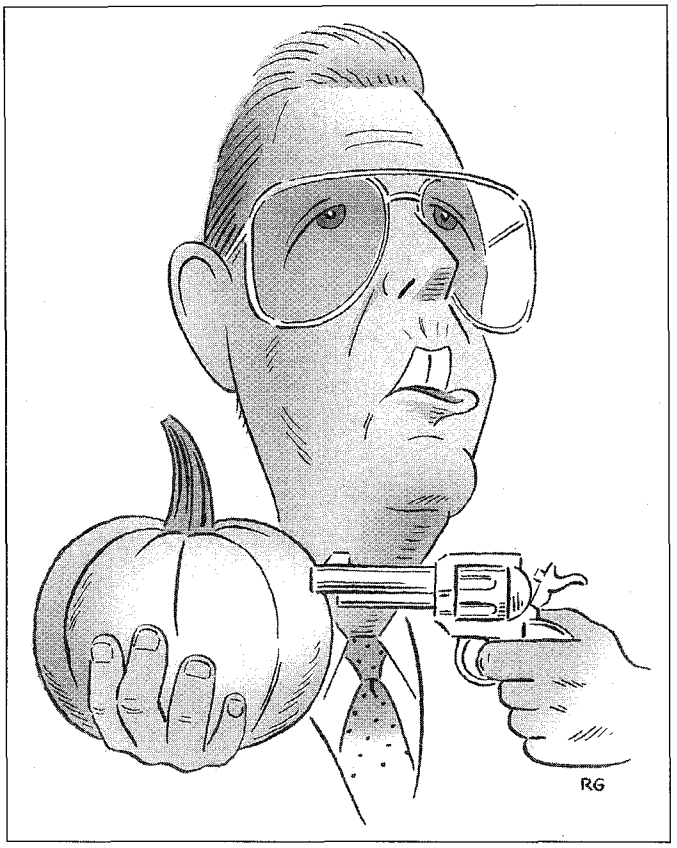
> His name was Jorge.
> Jorge Cabrera.
> They say he ran a little
> coke and he had good
> cigars to smoke....

You get the point. For the minor members, the day served as a poignant reminder of how hard it is to distinguish yourself in the overstuffed House. The point registered especially on the new members. "It's frustrating," said a weary Elijah Cummings, the Democrat from Maryland who replaced Kweisi Mfume. "We all repeat ourselves, so what should take twenty minutes takes four hours." His twitchy press secretary then whispered something nervously to his boss. I caught the words "education" and "children." "Oh yeah," said Cummings, with heartbreaking cheer. "That's what I came here for." And he proudly held up a tie dotted with shiny Crayola stick figures.

By the second day, Burton's gentleman strategy began to work against him. The first witness was Manlin Foung, sister of the melodically named Charles Yah Lin Trie, one of Clinton's shady fund-raisers. Bennett and Burton calmly opened the questioning, and laid out a solid narrative of how Trie got his sister to write checks for him to the Democratic National Committee and then paid her back.

Matronly in her thick, owlish glasses, Foung spoke halting English. She said she did not know what DNC stood for when she wrote the check, and she almost never attended political events. "I am hard-working, blue-collar person," she said. "I pay all my taxes. I pay all my bills." When Burton finished, his colleagues took over. Although there were no TV cameras at the hearing, and only a handful of print reporters, the Republicans somehow got the idea they should put on a grisly show. First Chris Cox lectured Foung: "I want to believe you're an honest person. But you and Mr. [Joseph] Landon laundered money. It's one thing to not know it at the time and another to suggest weeks later you did not know what was going on. I don't want to encourage you to get involved in politics if you don't know what's going on." Chris Shays was in even a more surly mood. He asked some run-on question, then ordered her to "just answer yes or no."

> Foung: Could you repeat the question without all those things in the beginning?
> Shays: No I will not repeat any question.



DAN BURTON BY ROBERT GROSSMAN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

By this point Foung's voice was quivering. Before she left, Burton put a comforting arm around her, apologized for the grueling morning, and thanked her for coming.

Enter David Wang, a used car dealer from California. As soon as he walked in the room, Waxman pounced. Wang testified that an associate of John Huang reimbursed him with envelopes stuffed with $10,000 after Huang asked him to make a contribution. But Waxman released documents showing Huang was in New York on the day the exchange supposedly took place. The Republicans had known for a few days what Waxman was up to, according to staffers, and still they did nothing. And still Burton sat smiling through clenched teeth.

The day ended in bitter stalemate. Burton wound up yelling at colleagues and staff behind the scenes. Reporters wound up wishing Burton would yell on stage, and drop the Trent Lott act. Even Waxman's victorious Democrats left feeling dejected. "The administration are either nefarious or lunkheads, and either way we don't want to line up with them," says a Democratic staffer. "But we can't line up with Republicans, either,

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since they're completely irresponsible. When I left the hearing, I just wanted to take a shower."

But perhaps the most disappointed are new members. "I hate to sound Pollyanish," says Rod Blagojevich, a first-term Democrat from Illinois, "but I didn't expect the partisanship to be so thick." So far, he's been one of the few to last through most of the hearings. "I'll see how long I can take it," he says, sighing. •

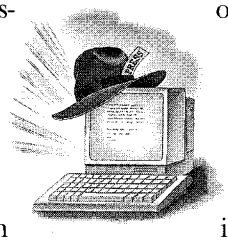
SIERRA LEONE DISPATCH

MAGIC KINGDOM

By David Hecht

The best hope for democracy in Sierra Leone may be a band of bush hunters armed with magic. The hunters are the Kamajors, one of an assortment of secret societies in this tiny West African nation. Although they've recently acquired AK-47s and rocket launchers, they are not exactly contras or the mujahideen. Their most cherished weapon is a special cape embedded with amulets, which is said to render the wearer invisible and deflect all bullets.

Given the current state of Sierra Leone, it is understandable that so many people are turning to mystical forms of protection. The problem is not just that, in May, the army overthrew the country's fledgling democracy, but that it coopted the equally brutal rebels who they claimed to be fighting. Together the two military forces have formed what they call the "People's Army"—and terrorized the countryside in an effort to keep the democratically elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah from ever returning.



That the two opposing sides of a civil war could join together in a matter of days astonished many observers. But it had been predicted by local peasants, thousands of whom have been killed and tortured since the war first crossed over from neighboring Liberia six years ago. Many had claimed that the men who came to pillage their villages were a mixture of rebels or soldiers, which they simply called "sobels," literally a combination of the word soldier and rebel. At one of the many overcrowded displaced persons camps near the town of Kenema in the eastern interior, Bonya Morrie, 30, says that in 1995 she and her 9-year-old boy were ambushed by a band, some in uniform, and held for nine months. "They claimed they were army one day, rebels the next," she said. Both she and her child had matching burn marks on their faces, which she said was from being tortured with drops of melted plastic.

In another camp a hundred miles west at the town of Bo, Adama Gardura, 23, told of how men came and massacred almost everyone in her village. "My 12-year-old sister had her arms and legs chopped off and bled to death," she said with little expression. "They kept me alive to cook and for sex." She escaped after a year, she said, also never knowing which side her captors were on.

A million peasants have fled their villages to vast camps around the country's main towns and cities. They searched for safety in numbers, but the "sobels" simply attacked them in bunches. With nowhere to turn, peasants finally joined the secret societies, and armed themselves with machetes and old hunting muskets.

Similar groups had been formed in the colonial days, fomenting popular rebellions against the British. In 1898, the Poro secret society united the nation's various ethnic and linguistic tribes in a major uprising known as the hut tax war. Most people's lives continue to revolve around the country's myriad secret societies. Some are simply circumcision societies or the local branch of freemasonry; others are political and militant. Last year, the all-woman's Bundo secret society—into which 90 percent of Sierra Leone women are initiated—mobilized grassroots support for the national elections.

Still, there are worries about the role of secret organizations in building a democracy. John Karefa-Smart, the main opposition leader during the country's short democratic period, claims that "secret societies no longer have a place in politics"—even though he himself is a "proud member" of the Poro society. Highly secretive and unaccountable, he says they remain, by their very nature, undemocratic. He even blames Sierra Leone's current predicament on the alliance between ousted President Kabbah and secret society militias like Kamajors.

In fact, that alliance exacerbated the fears of the army, which had only reluctantly handed power over to Kabbah in March 1996, after intense international and local pressure. At first, they seemed quiescent, as aid poured in from around the world, including the United States, and the nation's growth rate jumped from -10 percent to +5 percent. In November, Kabbah signed a comprehensive peace agreement with rebel leader Foday Sankoh, seemingly ending any threat to his authority. But fearful of the military, Kabbah—who had spent twenty-two years as a meek bureaucrat with the United Nations—armed and supported the Kamajors and other secret militias.

Shortly afterwards, angry soldiers launched a series of failed coup attempts. The fourth one began with renegade soldiers breaking into the country's main jail and springing Major Johnny Paul Koromah, the mastermind of one of the earlier attempts, as well as the 700 other prisoners inside, many of whom were hardened criminals. Kabbah fled to nearby Guinea, but made a statement assuring citizens that "this will all be over soon" because Nigerian-led West African regional forces were in the process of restoring constitutional rule. That was when Major Koromah called on the rebels to join him, offering Sankoh—and his supposed enemy—the vice presidency.

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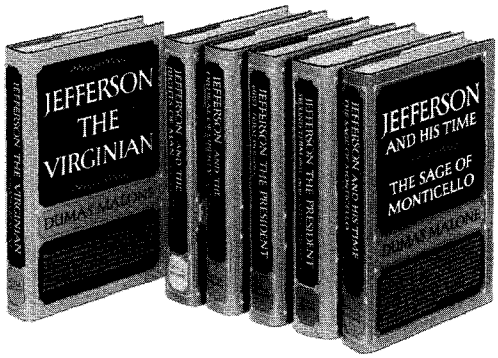

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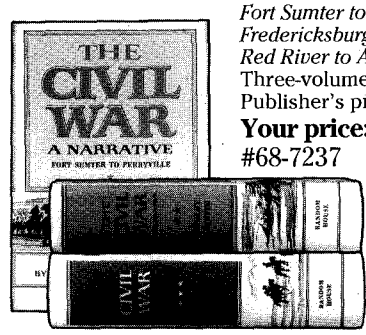

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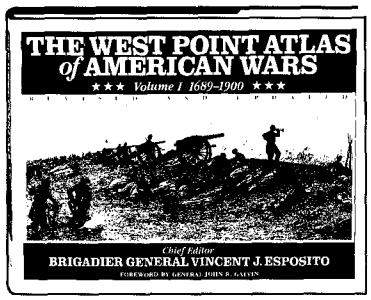

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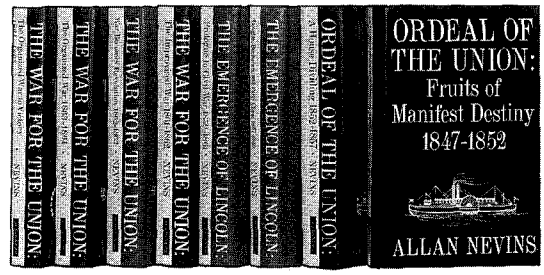
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Thousands of heavily armed youth streamed into Freetown, the country's capital. According to locals there, many were high on drugs as they looted and terrorized the city. A Nigerian naval bombardment of the city followed. But this only hardened the resolve of the new People's Army and alienated the populace. Thousands of locals went to the bush and were initiated into the Kamajors, transforming it from a civil defense unit into a fighting army.

Since then, battles have taken place in the south in and around the town of Zimmi, as well as on the highways leading to the diamond mining towns of Bo and Kenema. The People's Army has complained that bands of Kamajors are infiltrating Freetown and lately Kamajors are said to be working with the Nigerian-led regional force. Clashes with the People's Army are reported daily.

As of now, the country lingers in a kind perpetual purgatory, between peace and war. Most banks and businesses remain closed. Sierra Leone has the worst food crisis in Africa and at least 20,000 civilians have fled the country. Even the People's Army—although nominally in control—appears to be in some disarray. On October 6, soldiers of the People's Army were even seen fighting each other. "Nobody seems to be in command," one policeman told me. Recently an attendant at a gas station in Freetown was shot dead after refusing to give over precious fuel to a man in camouflage army pants and T-shirt. Other men in uniform then arrived, claimed the killer was not a legitimate soldier, and shot him dead, too.

Nigerian-led forces are trying to enforce sanctions from their strongholds around Freetown, which include the airport, and they are poised for an invasion. But they do not have full international support, partly because Nigeria's own leader, General Sani Abacha, came to power in a coup no more legitimate than the one he is now trying to undo, and partly because many doubt an invasion would work. "They would probably route the People's Army eventually," says a senior U.S. official, "but not without making a bloody mess. And then the rebels would likely retreat to the bush and restart the war." Anyway, citizens of Sierra Leone are almost as terrified of the Nigerians as they are of the People's Army. "We don't need military intervention," said one woman. "We need divine intervention."

Which brings us back to the bush hunters and their magic capes. Political economist Achille Mbembe thinks the Kamajors' association with mysticism gives them precious legitimacy with the peasantry: "Nation building always requires a kind of make believe, whether it is God, money, or the nation spirit. The Kamajors are using local codes and metaphors—that's a good thing." The Kamajors may not exactly be latter-day George Washingtons, but the battered people of Sierra Leone will take what they can get.

DAVID HECHT is a BBC correspondent in Senegal and coauthor of a book on Africa, *Invisible Governance* (Autonomedia).

So much for due process.

CALLING CANARD

By Susan Estrich and Kathleen M. Sullivan

While ignorance of the law is no excuse in the United States, there must be a clearly defined law before you can be prosecuted for breaking it. It was not always this way: during the colonial period, the British frequently punished political enemies by passing laws that singled out individuals, decreed certain acts illegal after the fact, or did away with due process. The Framers of our Constitution decided to change that, and for the most part they succeeded. Today, prosecutors must work from the crime to the person; policy must be created by accountable representatives of the people, not improvised by police and prosecutors on the fly; and above all, prosecution must not be selective or discriminatory.

But some seem unwilling to apply those principles when it comes to Vice President Al Gore's infamous White House fund-raising calls. Gore's critics charge that his calls violated a section of the Pendleton Act, a century-old law that makes it a crime to "solicit or receive" political campaign contributions in a federal building. They mock Gore's defense that there was "no controlling legal authority" for applying the disputed statute—section 607 of the current criminal code—to his calls. And as further proof that Gore committed a crime, they have seized upon recent revelations that the Democratic Party may have used some of the money Gore plausibly thought he was raising as "soft money" for the party, which is not covered by the Pendleton Act, as "hard money" for specific candidates, which is.

Attorney General Janet Reno has been right to reject these arguments so far. "No controlling authority" doesn't sound great on TV. But from a legal standpoint, the vice president got it exactly right. The principle that one deserves fair warning from prior precedent has long been a bedrock of our constitutional system. Where the scope of a criminal statute is unclear, it must be narrowly construed, not broadly applied in an effort to inflict political damage or even to secure what some might consider the better practice. And whether section 607 applies to phone calls by the vice president to wealthy private donors is anything but clear.

The sponsors of the statute, first drafted in 1882, intended it to protect federal workers, most of whom owed their jobs to patronage, from being solicited for political contributions at their desks. In floor debate, for example, Republican Senator Joseph Hawley of Connecticut condemned the "oppressive extraction" of

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money from federal employees and Ohio Democratic Senator George Pendleton ridiculed claims that such contributions were "voluntary."

Much has changed since then, including the expansion of civil service protections also launched by Pendleton. But even modern interpretations of section 607 have found its purpose was to prevent solicitation of federal workers, not private parties. In 1974, the Watergate special prosecutor concluded that the law "was intended to protect federal civil service employees from coercion and thus prohibits the solicitation or receipt of contributions only from such employees." The House Ethics Committee took the same position in 1985, concluding that section 607 "was intended to protect federal employees from coercion vis-a-vis political contributions and to insulate the federal workplace from such solicitations."

As some of Gore's opponents note, the 1995 Justice Department manual on election law takes the position that "employment status" of the parties is immaterial, concluding that what matters is "the federal character of the place where the solicitation took place or was directed." But even this manual limits prosecutable violations of section 607 to "solicitations that can be characterized as shakedowns of federal personnel"—with no mention of private parties, much less those called by telephone from a federal office.

Even if the statute did apply to solicitations of private parties, the key factor may be not whether a solicitation is made from a federal building, but whether it is received in one. Section 607 has been the subject of only four reported court cases, the most recent over forty years ago. In 1908, on the one occasion the Supreme Court weighed in, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes affirmed a conviction of a Texas Republican state committee member who had mailed a solicitation to a federal tax official at work, holding that a "solicitation" is made in the place where it is received, not where it was initiated. As Holmes noted, this interpretation is consistent with the statutory purpose of protecting federal employees on the job. It also would exclude Gore's phone calls, made from the White House but not to any federal office or its occupant. Some argue that the logic of that decision no longer applies, since it predates the telephone era. But a change in technology does not change the principle: section 607 obviously might extend to a telephone solicitation of a federal employee, even if the call was placed from outside the office, but it hardly follows that the invention of the telephone makes it a crime to place a phone call in the opposite direction.

Quite apart from the circumstances of the actual solicitation, there is the question of whether section 607 applies to the president and the vice president. The Hatch Act, which, like the Pendleton Act, is designed to prevent political coercion of public employees, specifically exempts them both from its civil prohibitions. It would be illogical to exempt the president and the vice president from a lesser punishment and expose them only to the harsher one.

Moreover, there is no specific mention of the president or the vice president in section 607, and this silence may be fatal to its application. The independence of the executive and legislative branches from one another's control is so basic to our separation of powers that laws usually apply to the president and the vice president only if Congress expressly says so. In 1992, the Supreme Court held that when Congress restricted the activities of all federal "agencies" in the Administrative Procedure Act, that restriction could not be applied to the president and the vice president unless Congress's intent to do so was clearly stated. If that is true for administrative rules, surely it should be true for laws that criminalize core political activity by executive branch principals.

At best, then, the case for applying the Pendleton Act to Gore's calls is shaky. Normally the Justice Department would not prosecute such a case. It would wait for Congress to speak clearly about whether such conduct should be criminal. Indeed, the Justice Department has deliberately declined to prosecute similar cases in recent years. And the attorney general is not supposed to trigger the independent counsel law except in cases that the Justice Department would ordinarily pursue.

Some of Gore's critics seem to think that these defenses evaporate if, as recent revelations suggest, some of the money Gore raised ended up being used as hard money, or direct campaign contributions—regardless of whether he or the donors knew as much. While scrutiny of those transfers might be understandable, they do not change the case against Gore. A basic principle of criminal law is that *mens rea*—that is, a guilty mind—is required at the time an alleged crime is committed. Someone who thinks he's buying baking soda is not guilty of a drug crime if it turns out to be cocaine instead. Gore's claim that he did not intend to raise any hard money seems plausible, since he was soliciting donations each in excess of $20,000, lower than federally mandated ceilings. Even if some funds solicited by the vice president were later converted into hard money, no prosecution could proceed unless hard money was what he intended to solicit.

In short, the question before Reno and anyone else who would prosecute Pendleton Act violations against Gore is not whether White House fund-raising calls should be treated as criminal, but whether Gore had reason to know they were criminal at the time he made the calls. If the attorney general and her assistants could look at the same call sheets the vice president saw and conclude that they were for "soft money" calls—as they did in April when first concluding that no independent counsel was appropriate—it would surely be reasonable for him to have believed the same thing. The public can debate the desirability of such fund-raising practices when Al Gore runs for president. Hindsight may be appropriate in politics, but not under the rule of law.

SUSAN ESTRICH is Robert Kingsley Professor of Law and Political Science at the University of Southern California and a nationally syndicated columnist. KATHLEEN M. SULLIVAN is Stanley Morrison Professor of Law at Stanford University and coauthor of *New Federalist Papers: Essays in Defense of the Constitution.*

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Why this is no time to gloat.

SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

By Paul Krugman

At Bill Clinton's famous pre-inaugural economic summit in Little Rock in 1992, speaker after speaker invoked the end of the American Century. They darkly contrasted the United States not only with that economic paragon Japan, but even Europe. The president-elect quoted Lester Thurow's best-seller *Head to Head*, which declared that "Future historians will record that the twenty-first century belonged to the House of Europe!" But history, it turns out, is an ironist. In reality, 1992 was the year in which Japanese growth stalled, and in which Europhoria turned out to be just a brief remission in the grim progress of Eurosclerosis. The United States, meanwhile, has achieved the lowest unemployment rate in a generation—without even a hint of resurgent inflation.

Americans may be entitled to some malicious glee at the expense of those who used to lecture us on our failings—although trying to force Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl to wear cowboy costumes, as we did at the Denver economic summit last June, is surely going too far. But triumphalism presents its own troubles: though the "American model" has scored some important successes, it continues to fail in other respects, above all in generating an ever-increasing level of inequality. And we won't begin to address those failures if the national mood remains dominated by self-congratulation.

America's superiority complex rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of our success. The area in which America has been undeniably successful is job creation. In the past, efforts to expand employment have been limited by the threat of inflation: as workers become scarce, they use their increased bargaining power to ask for more money. The increase in labor costs, in turn, drives up prices, and job growth grinds to a halt. This scenario played itself out here and elsewhere as recently as the late 1980s, and it is why central bankers, hoping to contain inflation, generally raise interest rates during periods of low unemployment. But remarkably, in the U.S. inflation has remained low even as Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan has—to his credit—allowed the unemployment rate to fall below 5 percent.

What explains this good news? The prevailing belief, which we'll call the *Business Week* theory, is that U.S. companies have become more productive: their ability to produce ever more goods with a given amount of labor has kept costs down, thus allowing rapid growth without inflation. Just what this theory means for policymakers depends on which ones you ask. Many people—mostly, but not only, in the Republican Party—regard America's good economic news as a vindication of the economic philosophy of Ronald Reagan. They claim that our prosperity is the result of reductions in tax rates, which have encouraged productivity-enhancing investment; and they have argued, to good political effect, that for the economy to grow further, America need only push those taxes even lower.

Liberals who subscribe to the *Business Week* theory agree that there is room for higher growth, although their explanation of how we got there is different—and thus, so is their prescription for the future. If productivity is up, they say, then workers deserve better pay. They recommend policies that strengthen unions or might otherwise encourage higher wages. Some also suggest protectionist trade policies to eliminate low-wage competition from abroad. Above all, the liberals suggest, the Fed should lower interest rates to keep the economy humming. (On this, some conservatives agree.)

The problem with both views is that the premise—the idea that the good news on inflation is the result of a revolution in productivity—doesn't make sense. There is, for starters, the awkward fact that America runs large trade deficits. Trade deficits aren't necessarily bad; they can be a sign of strength. But their persistence undermines the claim that American business has achieved great strides in productivity and product quality. In 1995, a Japanese employer had to pay hourly wages and benefits 38 percent higher than his American counterpart (although the cost of living was higher in Japan); the margin for German workers was 85 percent. But despite this cost advantage, America still ran a trade deficit of more than $100 billion. If U.S. companies have become so efficient, why can't their wares—produced by such relatively cheaper labor—do better on world markets?

Another reason to be skeptical about the productivity premise is that there's no evidence of it in the data. Official statistics say that from 1990 to 1996 productivity—output per hour worked—rose at an annual rate of less than 1 percent. That's about the same rate as the disappointing growth from 1973 to 1990; it is nothing like the nearly 3 percent growth of the 1950s and 1960s.

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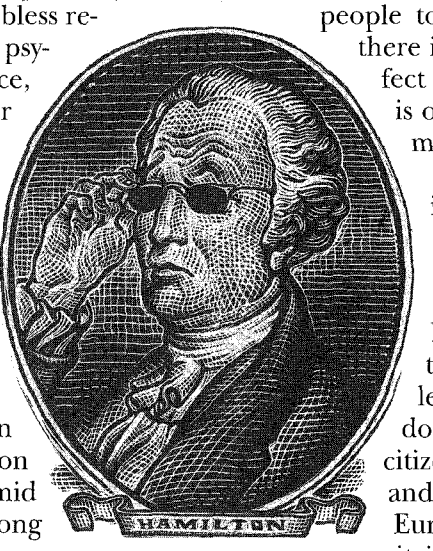
And it is slower than the rate of productivity growth in Germany, France, or Japan. It's true that many business leaders insist that the data are wrong—that old-fashioned statistics cannot keep up with the new economy. But if so, then our estimate of inflation must, in turn, be too high. (This is because inflation and productivity are calculated from the same numbers.) And if our estimate of inflation is too high, then our real rate of inflation must be close to zero—which is a cheerful enough thought, but still doesn't help explain why even the *measured* rate of inflation has stayed so low.

So if productivity isn't the explanation, what is? The proximate answer is simple: prices aren't going up much because wages, the main component of costs, aren't going up much either. Despite an abundance of jobs and actual labor shortages in some places, workers have been astonishingly cautious about demanding better pay. Some economists see subtle signs of a wage acceleration just beginning; but few would have thought that the signs would be so subtle in such a favorable job market.

The main reason for worker restraint is probably fear: apparently the recession and initially jobless recovery left a deep mark on the national psyche. Downsizing has shaken confidence, and there's always the specter—real or imagined—that a worker in a Third World country can do your job for a fraction of your salary. Unions here are too weak to bargain for higher wages; and if a U.S. worker loses his job, he had better take another one soon on whatever terms he can get. In most other advanced countries, it is possible in practice for the unemployed to collect some income support indefinitely. In America, after twenty-six weeks, you're on your own. With such a nervous and timid workforce, the economy can gallop along for a while without setting in motion a wage-price spiral. And so we are left with a paradox: we have more or less full employment only because individual workers do not feel secure in their jobs. Indeed, we are able to be prosperous as a nation precisely because as individuals we do not trust in that prosperity. The secret of our success is not productivity, but anxiety.



There is something to be said for such an economy; things could be worse, and in most countries they are. But rather than congratulate ourselves, we should be asking whether our system really has to be as harsh and brutal as it is. Conservatives insist that growth will solve all problems, and that the way to achieve that growth is still lower marginal tax rates (and hence lower tax rates on the rich). But while America has greatly reduced marginal tax rates from their mid-'70s levels, and while we have substantially lower overall taxes than European countries, none of the good things that were supposed to happen as a result of lower tax rates have actually happened. In particular, investment is *not* up. Indeed, as a share of Gross Domestic Product, investment is a bit lower than it was twenty years ago, and substantially lower than it is in those high-tax European countries.

Unfortunately the usual liberal solution isn't credible, either. As the sad state of Europe shows, countries that are too solicitous about the wages and job security of employees tend to find themselves stuck with high unemployment. While it's true that the recent increase in our own minimum wage has had no visible adverse effect on employment, that was probably because America's minimum wage is still so low that it hardly matters.

But if we reject both the claims of conservatives that tax cuts for the rich will create prosperity for all, and the claims of liberals that the market can be ordered to produce fairer outcomes without nasty side effects on employment, what is left? The answer is to let markets work—but to redistribute some of the wealth to those who would otherwise not share in prosperity. We already have a program that shows the way. The Earned Income Tax Credit raises incomes for many of the working poor by as much as 40 percent, at a taxpayer cost of about 0.4 percent of GDP—and most studies indicate that it not only raises incomes but encourages more people to work. The program isn't perfect—there is some waste and abuse—but the perfect is the enemy of the good, and the EITC is overwhelmingly a good thing. Let's do more of the same.

Another sensible way to increase living standards without meddling with the economy's ability to create jobs would be to provide better social services. True, this may sound like the kind of thing that European countries—who are now disparaged as mindlessly as they used to be praised—tend to do. But Europe isn't sclerotic because its citizens have national health insurance; and such insurance wouldn't bring Eurosclerosis to America. On the contrary, it is our *current* system that discourages poor people from trying to better themselves; the prospect of losing Medicaid if they do too well amounts to a tax on gainful employment. Like the EITC, an expansion of health insurance would help make our society less brutal while actually promoting employment.

Where is the money for this to come from? From taxes. Remember that there is no evidence that the tax cuts of the '80s did anything positive for the economy—and no reason to expect any positive effects from the tax cuts embodied in the latest budget deal, many of which provide no incentive to work harder, invest more, or take bigger risks. If we really wanted to spend an extra 2, 3, or even 4 percent of GDP helping our less fortunate citizens, we could do it with few, if any, adverse side effects. The truth is that nothing in the experience of the last few years contradicts the idea that we could have a kinder, gentler economy that preserves the main virtue of the American system—high employment. All it would take is compassion. And a little less gloating.

Paul Krugman is professor of economics at MIT.

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THE SUN ALSO RISES

By John B. Judis

Political and business elites on both sides of the Pacific have embraced the idea that Japan, which once seemed on the verge of surpassing the United States as the world's leading economy, has stumbled and fallen. The notion started in Japan, not in the U.S., back in 1995, when Japanese journalists and government officials began bemoaning what they called "Japan passing." It was an ambiguous term meaning both that the U.S. was surpassing Japan economically as well as bypassing it for alliances with China and other Asian countries. Last year Japan's leading business daily, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, even inaugurated a front page column called, "WARNING BELL FOR THE YEAR 2020: JAPAN DISAPPEARS."

When I was in Japan this spring on a five-city speaking tour for the United States Information Service, I encountered the same sentiment from businessmen, journalists, academics, and government officials. "We are in decline," one former government official lamented. "We have to Americanize." A Tokyo economist, echoing *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, proclaimed that the correct slogan was not "Japan passing" but "Japan disappeared." A business journalist in Fukuoka, a city on the island's southern tip, described Japan as a "nightmare." By my visit's end, I realized that I wasn't getting the chance sum of individual reflections, but a national consensus that had radiated outward from Tokyo's elite policy circles.

This consensus has gradually moved across the Pacific to the United States, where it has been taken up by intellectuals of different political convictions. In *The Wall Street Journal*, columnist Paul Gigot wrote last February of Japan's "five years of economic trouble" and its "bureaucratic bust." "All that's left now," Gigot concluded in a comparison of the two countries, "is American capitalism more or less." In the Baltimore *Sun*, editorialist Daniel Berger claimed that "Japan is reeling in the sixth year of economic decline that is seen there as structural if not terminal." The Clinton administration has also joined the chorus: last year, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Lawrence Summers privately quipped to reporters, "Japan today is an island with 125 million people growing old, who haven't invented anything new since the Sony Walkman."

Has the actual ground shifted so fundamentally from the early '90s, when many Americans, including myself, believed that the U.S. and not Japan was in decline, and when former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone and other Japanese leaders speculated condescendingly on the source of our ills? Or has something much less obvious taken place that can't be captured in a contest for which country has the stronger economy?

My own conclusion is that the new consensus is no more insightful than the old. While American and Japanese intellectuals clearly exaggerated Japan's strengths in the early '90s, they are currently exaggerating Japan's weaknesses in relation to the United States. We Americans, of course, have been subject to regular bouts of self-congratulation—from the "Reagan revolution" to the "new economy." Japan's leaders, on the other hand, have periodically decried Japan's inferiority to the West in order to spur their people to greater exertion—and sometimes, too, to conceal domestic ills. In this case, Japan's policymakers are using the cry of "Japan passing" not only to justify major expenditures in science and technology, but also, ironically, to divert attention from Japan's continued strength—evidenced in its growing trade surplus. Japan does have serious economic weaknesses—ones that could plunge it into a steep recession, and take us with it—but they have nothing to do with how it is faring in its immediate competition with the United States.

I.

When either American or Japanese pundits declare that Japan is passing, they are conflating two very different questions. The first is the question of whether Japan has fallen far behind the U.S. economically. The second is whether the Japanese economy can maintain its pace and commitments over the next few decades without wrenching changes that could endanger the rest of the world. When I visited Japan, I could find little tangible evidence for the first notion. Many of the normal appurtenances of daily life—buses, trains, telephones, and elevators—work better than they do in the U.S. And while Japan's overall growth rates have slowed from the '80s, it remains the world leader in many areas of manufacturing, including automobiles, machine tools, chemicals, and electronics.

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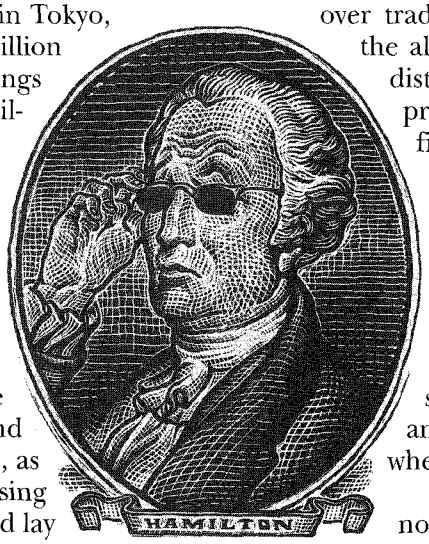
Toyota and Honda still make better cars with fewer labor hours than their American or European counterparts. Japan now controls 32 percent of the U.S. market for autos and 42 percent of the market for auto parts—both all-time highs. Japanese companies rely on Intel for computer microprocessors, but Intel can't make a chip without Japanese ceramic and silicon wafer technology. Dell, Gateway, and other American companies successfully market laptops, but the Japanese actually make most of them, including all the screens, which are the most expensive component. And while Microsoft has cornered the market on PC software, the Japanese excel in game software as well as embedded software for elevators, cars, consumer electronics, and office equipment.

Japan also exercises significant power over American financial institutions. Since the early '80s, Japan has become America's creditor, just as America became Britain's creditor after World War I. Japan now controls about a third of the world's savings, and in the last three years it has bought up as much as 40 percent of newly issued American Treasury notes. According to Ron Bevacqua, a Merrill Lynch economist in Tokyo, the Bank of Japan owns well over $200 billion in U.S. bonds, and total Japanese holdings are between $500 billion and $600 billion—more than any other country's.



This alone is testimony to Japan's position of strength. If Japan should start unloading its T-bills or stop buying new ones, then the U.S. would face a financial crunch. Interest rates would have to rise to attract buyers for Treasury notes, and Americans, including those who believe that we have beaten the business cycle, would find themselves in the midst of a downturn, as American firms, discouraged by rising rates, began to cut back production and lay off workers. This isn't a fantasy scenario: this June, in a speech just after the summit in Denver of the major industrial nations, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto raised the possibility that Japan could unload its T-bills and start buying gold instead. When word of Hashimoto's comment spread to Wall Street, the Dow Jones industrial average plunged 192 points, the steepest drop since the 1987 crash.

II.

While Japan's top companies, including Toyota, Kyocera, Hitachi, and Komatsu, stand astride their industries, and while its economy has not fallen significantly behind that of the U.S., Japan does face daunting long-term problems that many Japanese leaders would prefer to ignore. In this decade, the Japanese have finally come up against the limits of the economic model that had guided them since the late 1940s. The very measures of Japan's strength—the rising value of its yen against the dollar and its burgeoning trade surplus—have become symptoms of an underlying structural weakness.

Japan has employed what political scientist Chalmers Johnson calls a "capitalist developmental state"—a system linking government ministries with banks, trading companies, corporations, and distribution outlets—to achieve its goal of creating export surpluses with the West. This economic model resembles that of sixteenth-century mercantilists, except that the Japanese have used manufacturing rather than conquest to acquire their riches. Although the strategy succeeded brilliantly, and is now being mimicked throughout Asia, for Japan it has begun to show serious signs of wear.

The system functioned in roughly the following way: workers were encouraged to save by high land prices and paltry retirement programs; their savings, by law, went into Japanese institutions, including postal savings accounts, where they were under the control of the government, which allocated these funds to those industries that stood the best chance of competing internationally. At the same time, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) used its control over trade, foreign exchange rates, tax policy, the allocation of natural resources, and the distribution of scarce foreign currency to promote strategic industries. Leading firms were protected against foreign competition, allowing them to earn high rates of profit from high prices at home to balance the losses they sometimes incurred from attempting to win market share overseas, even at the expense of profits. (It's still true today. If you want bargains in Japanese consumer electronics, buy them in the U.S. and not in Japan's controlled market, where prices run 50 percent higher.)

This neo-mercantilist approach would not have worked in a relatively closed world economy, where Japanese companies could not have found markets for the surplus of goods they were producing. Japanese savings would have been squandered as low domestic consumption caused firms to cut back production. But the U.S., which sought to strengthen Japan as a cold war ally, provided a huge market for Japanese goods without demanding open markets in return. By the early 1980s, the Japanese strategy was working brilliantly. The financial system was accumulating savings that it put in the hands of Japanese companies who used them to expand their productive capacity, which they used to expand Japan's trade surplus, which further enlarged the pool of savings.

At this point, Japan met with a fateful choice—a choice described in former Tokyo investment banker R. Taggart Murphy's remarkable book *The Weight of the Yen*. When countries run chronic trade surpluses, they have to provide other countries with the currency to purchase their imports. The U.S. solved this problem after World War II by opening American markets to foreign exporters and through foreign aid and investment, not to mention enormous overseas military expendi-

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tures, all of which provided other countries with the dollars to buy American goods. Japan could have responded to its surpluses of the early '80s by opening its markets—a choice that would have resulted in massive imports of cheaper foods, textiles, and wood products. But that also would have driven many Japanese companies and farms out of business. To avoid this prospect, the Ministry of Finance and MITI recycled the vast dollar surpluses Japan was acquiring back to the U.S. to finance America's growing budget and trade deficits.

This process has worked only fitfully, precipitating periodic crises. It may now be on the verge of a breakdown. By financing the American debt, the Japanese have artificially suppressed American interest rates, which has helped keep the U.S. economy humming. By purchasing Treasury bills, Japan also kept the dollar's value artificially high—which reduced the price of Japanese goods in the U.S. and raised the price of American goods in Japan. This has caused the American trade deficit to continue growing, which has eventually thrown into question the entire process.

By the mid-'80s, the first crisis was looming: the Reagan administration was under intense pressure to stem the loss of American manufacturing jobs from Japanese imports. In 1985, Secretary of the Treasury James Baker reached an agreement with Japan and the other advanced industrial countries to reduce the dollar's value against the yen in order to make American exports more competitive. The Plaza Accord, as the agreement was called, pleased American companies, but provoked consternation in Japan, where Japanese firms feared they would be priced out of the American market. The Ministry of Finance improvised a means to maintain the status quo: it lowered Japanese interest rates almost to zero, which made it easier for companies to finance new capacity and technological advances so they could compete internationally. But the resulting increase in the money supply also fueled enormous increases in stock prices and led to a historic real estate boom. (At its height, Tokyo real estate was worth more than all the land in the U.S. put together.)

The government's strategy amounted, in effect, to a reversal of Japan's earlier approach to economic growth. Instead of sustaining the strongest and most competitive Japanese firms, the Ministry of Finance's monetary gambit propped up weaker firms and encouraged stronger firms to embark on questionable side ventures. Government trade protections for Japanese rice farmers, textile firms, and other backward sectors of the economy had exactly the same effect. By the early '90s, the Japanese bubble began to burst, as real estate and stock prices began to plummet. But many bad investments still remain on the books of Japanese banks, and Japanese manufacturers remain burdened by enormous excess capacity created by easy money and cheap credit.

According to former investment banker and maverick intellectual Akio Mikuni, the president of Mikuni & Co. Ltd., the country's only independent bond-rating agency, Japan's auto companies can now produce about 13 million cars for domestic consumption, but there's only demand for 10 million. Toyota and Honda could weather a downturn in world trade, but several other companies would be forced out of business. One-tenth of the nation's commercial real estate is vacant; almost every month a new record is set for corporate bankruptcies. Kenneth Courtis, the chief economist of Deutsche Bank in Tokyo, estimates that Japan's banks are still carrying about $250 billion in bad loans. But instead of writing off these debts and forcing these businesses to pay their way, the Ministry of Finance continues to buoy them with cheap credit—interest rates are still about 1 percent—while MITI protects them from import competition.

At the center of Japan's current financial mess is its trade strategy and its economic relationship with the United States. Japan has continued to depend on its surplus with the U.S. and Asian countries to soak up its excess capacity. Without America's trade deficit, even Japan's larger companies could face an imminent crisis that could begin bringing down banks. But, in the 1990s, Japan's growing trade deficit depressed the value of the dollar against the yen. In April 1995, the yen hit an all-time high of 79 yen to the dollar (compared to 360 yen to the dollar in 1971!). The yen's strength threatened to expose the underlying weaknesses in Japan's economy by pricing its goods out of American and Asian markets—setting off, perhaps, a financial crisis.

The Japanese sought American help in raising the value of the dollar against the yen. (See "Dollar Foolish," TNR, December 9, 1996.) The U.S. Treasury Department obliged; in August 1995 the dollar's value against the yen began rising until it reached 126 yen this year. The U.S. got a reprieve from rising interest rates, which the falling dollar might have forced, while Japan, more importantly, was relieved from having to alter its basic economic strategy. It could continue to use export surpluses to drive its economy.

Treasury's deal with Japan underscored the instability of U.S.-Japanese economic relations. When America's trade deficit begins to rise, it threatens the viability of the dollar, whose worth is based ultimately on the value foreigners place on American goods as well as investments; but when the dollar begins to fall, it threatens Japanese exports and the solvency of the Japanese financial system. The U.S. stock market crash in October 1987 was a warning blast. It was precipitated by the release of figures showing that even after the Plaza Accord, the trade deficit with Japan had continued to climb. The crash was only halted by massive Japanese intervention. Now the U.S. could face a similar crisis. Because export contracts often run a year or two in advance, currency swings don't immediately effect trade balances. But the deal that the Treasury Department reached with Japan in 1995 is beginning to take its toll on American trade with the deficit nearing record heights. In the first six months of 1997, the U.S. trade deficit with Japan rose 48.8 percent from the previous six months. This July, it rose another 27 percent.

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In a speech earlier this year, Mikuni speculated on how this unstable economic relationship could play out over the next few years. If Japan's trade surplus continues to rise, the yen will eventually rebound against the dollar. In that case, Mikuni argues, the U.S. and Japan will face a dilemma. If the Federal Reserve fails to defend the dollar by raising interest rates (which would lead those holding other currencies to exchange them for dollars), then the yen will soar, putting Japan back where it was in spring 1995—facing the prospect of shrinking overseas markets and cutbacks in manufacturing, which could precipitate bankruptcies and bank closings. Japanese purchases of American Treasury bills would halt, forcing an increase in interest rates and a recession. Or take the alternative scenario. In that case, the Fed would respond to the falling dollar by raising interest rates. Then the U.S. economy would suffer a slowdown, Japan's overseas markets would shrink, and the Japanese financial system would begin to unravel. It's a different route to exactly the same result. "I hope I am being too pessimistic, but I fear the worst for the Japanese financial system is yet to come," Mikuni concluded.

Japan's neo-mercantile trade strategy is also threatening other Asian countries, which are relying on export surpluses of their own to finance their industrialization. While Japan has provided these countries with investment capital, it has not provided them with adequate markets for their manufactured goods. Since these countries trade in dollars rather than yen, the decline in the yen's value has further undermined their trade with Japan. Last year, the value of Japan's exports to Asia's newly industrializing countries exceeded its imports by 248 percent. That has put increased pressure on American trade with these countries; for their market of last resort is not Japan, but the U.S., with which most of them run a sizable surplus. Last April, for instance, the U.S. ran a $907 million deficit with Indonesia, Thailand, and other lesser developed Asian nations. As these Asian countries suffer themselves from a new slowdown, their exports to the U.S. will rise and their imports will fall. David Hale, the chief economist at Zurich Kemper Investments, predicts a 10 to 15 percent drop in American exports and a 20 to 25 percent increase in imports. That could mean a $300 billion trade deficit, enough to rattle even the most dogmatic proponent of open markets.

Growing trade friction could also have significant political and diplomatic repercussions. If U.S. markets were to become less hospitable to products from Thailand, Malaysia, or China—either because of a downturn or because of new trade policies that demand reciprocal access—growth rates in these countries would plummet, as would their standards of living. Their governments would face a much more restive population, and the potential for recrimination among the different countries in the region would grow. Of course, Japan could provide a reserve of political stability by opening its markets to goods from the region, but its current trade strategy, which entails running trade surpluses with its neighbors, only increases the possibility of regional strife.

III.

Japan's problem is not that it won't acknowledge its weakness and its passing, but that it won't recognize its strength. Japan's situation today somewhat resembles that of the U.S. in the 1920s. Like the U.S. then, it is unwilling to take responsibility for its enhanced position within the world capitalist system. Although it has become the world's creditor nation, it continues to defer to the dollar the way that Americans deferred to the British pound. Just as the U.S. did, it also refuses to undo the instability that its chronic trade surpluses have created. The U.S. in the 1920s was hamstrung by nostalgia for an earlier America free of foreign entanglements and protected behind tariff walls. Its policymaking was also dominated by an irresponsible business elite that would brook no interference with its narrow pursuit of gain. Japan, too, is wedded to an obsolete economic strategy. While Japanese officials have contemplated a range of "reforms," they always stop short of addressing the mercantilist roots of Japan's strategy.

Japan's response to the financial imbroglio of 1995, for instance, has been to throw billions of dollars in government money into science and technology in order to keep pace with or exceed American high-tech companies. In 1995, the Japanese Diet passed a law doubling government spending on science and technology by the year 2000. Last year, Japanese spending increased 5.8 percent. There is nothing wrong with such measures, but they are framed within Japan's historic aim of creating larger trade surpluses with the West. Japan also passed an increase in its consumption tax, intended to reduce its burgeoning budget deficits. But the new tax, which took effect this spring, not only precipitated an economic slowdown—Gross Domestic Product fell 2.9 percent in the second quarter—but has also aggravated the trade surplus by reducing demand for imports. This September, for instance, sales of imported vehicles dropped 15.8 percent from the previous year.

Those reforms that Japanese officials do contemplate rarely come to pass. As Karel van Wolferen argued in *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, Japan is hampered by an institutional sclerosis. While its bureaucracies operate effectively within their given domain, and according to assumptions that have prevailed since the '50s, if not before, they cannot effectively initiate major changes of course. Japan's elected government is largely irrelevant, leaving the country without a governing core capable of exerting leadership over the nation as a whole.

Many Japanese now believe that the only way to create change in Japan is through *gaiatsu*—foreign pressure. When I was in Tokyo, for instance, I heard frequent support from political scientists and economists for financial deregulation—which would mean Japan's subjecting its banks and corporations to the same kind of free market rules that govern American companies.

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Japanese government officials have even voiced support for a deregulatory "big bang," modeled on the radical deregulation that the Thatcher government initiated in Great Britain. If this kind of deregulation were to occur, Japanese companies would be bought and sold on the open market; their books would be open to public inspection and they would fail or be sold when their rate of return fell below acceptable levels; banks would have to compete with other financial instruments for savings, and when they became insolvent, would fold or be bought. But when I talked to businessmen about whether such deregulation would actually occur, I encountered healthy skepticism about whether the Japanese government would be willing to accept the chaos it would entail. In Toyama, an industrial city on the Sea of Japan, a former government official who is now a manager for a major Japanese company, said, "Everyone supports the principle, but no one wants to put it into practice. Only *gaiatsu* will work."

The U.S. had to endure a depression and a second world war before it was willing to assume a position of world leadership and move away from the kind of laissez-faire economics that Gigot and *Wall Street Journal* editorialists now want the U.S. to reembrace. It may take an economic crisis of the kind that Mikuni foresees for Japan to assume its role as a creditor nation and abandon its mercantilist strategy. But those who have studied Japan's history believe that at some point it will adapt to whatever challenges a new era of capitalism poses. "You always have to remember what Japan accomplished during the Meiji restoration," Robert Angel, a professor of political science at the University of South Carolina, says, referring to Japan's rise within a half-century from a feudal barony and prey of Western warships to a major imperialist power and competitor of Britain in Asian and Western textile markets.

The U.S. position in the '90s is not strictly analogous to that of Britain in the 1920s. British industry, clustered around relatively small firms, was structurally incapable of meeting the challenge of a new era of large-scale industrial manufacturing. Although the U.S. was slow to adopt advances in manufacturing that the Japanese pioneered in the '70s and '80s, American companies have recently begun to hold their own; and America's entrepreneurial culture has proved well suited to the creation of software and entertainment—two of the most important products of the new global economy. The U.S. certainly does not have to resign itself to a position of inferiority toward Japan, but it does have to recognize that the existing economic relationship between the two countries, based on American acquiescence in Japanese trade surpluses, is intolerable.

Clinton, who emphasized U.S. relations with Japan during his first two years in office, seems to have forgotten about Japan. He did not mention Japan in his State of the Union address this year, and his Council of Economic Advisers' annual *Economic Report to the President*, submitted this February, did not include a discussion of Japan, although there are extensive sections on Mexico, China, and other East Asian countries. The White House took almost a year to nominate a new ambassador to Japan. And the choice, former House Speaker Tom Foley, is known in Tokyo as someone who is eager to please.

Responsibility for U.S.-Japan relations has largely devolved on Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin and Lawrence Summers, his deputy. Both men understand the fragility of Japan's financial superstructure, but they have been unwilling to force Japan to abandon its reliance on trade surpluses. Since a brief, impassioned and unsuccessful effort to get Japan to agree to numerical targets for reducing its trade surplus in auto parts, the U.S. has stopped pressuring Japan at all. With Japan unable or unwilling to change on its own, that means the countries are stumbling in the dark toward crisis.

American complacency toward Japan is also taking its toll on how the U.S. organizes its own economy for the next century. Japan's current problems are not due to government planning per se. If anything, Japan needs more not less government planning if it is to move from a mercantile strategy of economic growth to one based on domestic demand. Yet Gigot and other conservatives take Japan's problems as proof that a laissez-faire model is the only appropriate one.

The rest of Washington swallows this same ridiculous assumption. The Clinton administration took office committed to increasing spending on science and technology, but faced with opposition from the Republican Congress, has backed down completely and embraced the Republican's laissez-faire approach. While Japanese spending is accelerating, American government spending on science and technology has declined 4.2 percent from 1994, and under the current budget plan for 2002 would decline 9.4 percent by the year 2002. *The Wall Street Journal* might argue that any government spending is thrown away. But while the U.S. and Japan have both wasted money on futile ventures, government investments have been instrumental since the 1950s in the development of high-tech industries. If you look at the success of American industry in the early '90s, you'll see the basis for it in the Reagan administration's tough trade strategy—aimed at protecting the American semiconductor, automobile, machine tool, steel, and textile industries—and its spending on science and technology, driven partly, but not exclusively, by Pentagon concerns.

If the new avatars of laissez-faire capitalism get their way, America will face the next century with a disarmed trade strategy and with its major manufacturers at a disadvantage against state-subsidized competitors. Indeed, by the early twenty-first century, Americans could find themselves looking across the Pacific and talking about "America passing" rather than "Japan passing." If Americans don't want that to happen, we will have to pay closer attention to our relationship with Japan, and not draw boastful conclusions from current lamentations and tribulations in Tokyo. •

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THE HARD QUESTIONS

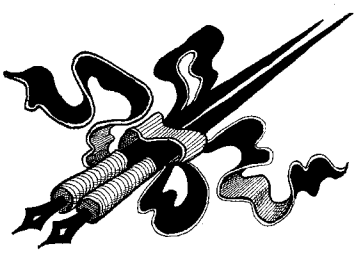
The fraud fraud

Defenders of privatization regularly refer to stories about waste and crime in the public sector. Indeed, there are a lot of stories, told by muckraking reporters or whistle-blowing civil servants—both groups standing in an old American tradition, though muckrakers once wrote about the private sector more often than they do today. In a way I feel comforted by these stories, even if I know in advance what they are going to say. Waste and crime go on—I can't do anything about that—but at least someone is watching

But these periodic exposés serve a political agenda, with which I am less comfortable. Is it really true that there is more waste and crime in the public than the private sector? I doubt it. Waste and crime are significant costs for private business, but almost no one is doing the journalistic work (or the academic research) necessary to keep us informed about them. We do occasionally hear from private-sector whistle-blowers, chiefly on environmental, health, and safety issues—most recently, for example, in the tobacco industry. But rarely does anyone address the simple question: How much of the price that consumers pay for goods and services goes to cover the costs of waste and crime?

The question itself suggests the reason why it is so rarely answered. The costs are passed on to consumers, and those who pass them on don't want us to know their extent. The case is similar in the public sector, where officials don't want taxpayers to know about the money they routinely lose. The only difference is that news stories about governmental waste and fraud are far more frequent: public-sector officials are less successful than private-sector managers in repressing the information. The greatest benefit of the public sector is its openness to scrutiny and criticism.

So let's try to open up the question of crime and corruption in the private sector. (I'll leave waste aside for now, though its costs are probably greater.) Marketplace crime commonly comes in three forms (the categories are suggested in *Big Money Crime* by Kitty Calavita, Henry Pontell, and Robert Tillman): first, crimes against a company committed by its employees, contractors, clients, and customers; second, crimes against the public committed by a company through tax evasion, price fixing, or the violation of safety and environmental laws; and third, crimes against a company and the public committed by the company itself, as in the looting of savings and loan associations in the 1980s, where the criminal activity was based on the principle that "the best way to rob a bank is to own a bank." I shall pursue only the first of these, since it comes closest to the standard stories of fraud in government programs like Medicare and Medicaid. (It is, of course, mostly private-sector contractors who perpetrate these frauds.) But readers should be warned that the second and third kinds of criminal activity are far more costly; the savings and loan scandals cost taxpayers more than $150 billion.



It isn't easy for an amateur like me to find information on marketplace crime, but some facts and figures are available on the Internet, and with a little help from my friends, I went in search of them. The most likely sources, I was told, are the companies that sell protection against fraud; they regularly collect and distribute data about fraudulent activities.

One of these companies—KPMG Investigation and Security, Inc., headquartered in Amsterdam—publishes an international fraud survey, based on a canvass of business leaders in eighteen countries. Reported losses in the 1995 canvass exceeded $1 billion, but the survey concludes that "in view of... the reluctance or inability of many respondents to quantify their losses ... this must be regarded as only the tip of the international fraud iceberg." Indeed, hard numbers are rare in the report; it is mostly perceptions and opinions that are quantified. Thus, 76 percent of American respondents described fraud as a major problem—making the United States one of the global "fraud hotspots."

The most common fraudulent activities are the obvious ones: kickbacks, company purchases for personal use, falsification of financial statements, misappropriation of cash (larceny and embezzlement), false representation, patent infringement, false invoices, and secret payments (bribes). The hardest hit sectors are also the obvious ones: insurance, financial services, and retail business. Again, quantification is difficult. A separate KPMG survey of airline fraud was unable to obtain meaningful data regarding the total cost of fraud. The only hard number that companies were willing to provide was the average "cost per single fraud occurrence," ranging from over $400,000 for kickbacks to $667 for cargo theft. No company revealed the number of cases from which these averages were calculated. The abuse of frequent flyer programs accounts for 28 percent of known "external fraud" (not the work of employees). But there is no account of how much this amounts to and no attempt to estimate the extent of unknown fraud.

All this is suggestive, if unsatisfying. And what it suggests is that there is a big story here, waiting for some stubborn and wily investigator. Given the debate about privatization (not only in the United States), fraud in the private sector is as much a matter of public interest and "need to know" as fraud in the public sector. Intelligent choices about public and private services can't be made without some sense of the relative losses to corrupt employees, contractors, clients, and customers in each one.

But doesn't the market give companies an incentive to reduce these costs? Obviously, KPMG and its likes would not be in business if there were no such incentives. And when the light of public debate illuminates some area of the private sector, like the health industry today, managers will work hard to reduce their losses—producing rules and regulations that rival those of governmental bureaucracies. On the other hand, the "reluctance or inability" of many companies to quantify their losses, the costs of protection, and the uncertainty of success, all militate against any major effort. And most often the light of publicity doesn't reach very far into the private sector. The lack of democratic openness and consumer awareness make it easy for companies to write off their losses and pass them on—so long as their competitors are doing the same thing. In effect, they agree to do the same thing, which is a perfectly legal form of collusion, well known also in government agencies.

Where are the losses to crime and corruption greater? It's hard to say. But the next time you hear politicians arguing for privatization, ask them if they know. Ask for hard numbers. After all, fraud is one of the more common forms of free enterprise, and, in a society as devoted to free enterprise as ours, its effects will be widely distributed: business entrepreneurs are unlikely to be outdone in fraudulent activity.

MICHAEL WALZER

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Seeing Is, Initially, Believing

I just don't have enough confidence in Nicole Kidman. I can't really rest easy with her as the head of the White House Nuclear Smuggling Group. Yet this is the job that **The Peacemaker** (DreamWorks) puts her in, and she bustles her sleek, slim way from Washington to Austria to Turkey to New York, saving you and me from nuclear disintegration. It might almost be possible to believe in the threat if I could believe in her ability to help thwart it.

The Peacemaker is the first offering of the new producing organization in which Steven Spielberg is a partner, and it's a firm step in an old direction. Political thrillers are a film-biz staple, and they have a standard recipe (as this column keeps mumbling): first, catch your rabbit. That is, first establish the verity—of protocol, equipment, etc.—then take off and add all the fantasy you like. The screenplay by Michael Schiffer is based on a book by Leslie and Andrew Cockburn; thus the credits themselves are a model of the way that facts were transmuted into fiction.

This script tackles the big problem for today's political thrillers: Who is the enemy? This time it's the Russians again—but corrupt ones, a colonel and some troops who are stealing nuclear warheads from Russia, trying to take them to Iran where they will be sold to one of the factions in the Balkan conflict. (Where those Balkan forces will get the multiple millions to pay for the nuclear weapons is not discussed.)

George Clooney is the Special Services colonel who has large experience in secret operations abroad and is willy-nilly teamed up with Kidman in their move to stop the Russians. Clooney, in a chunky clunky way, devoid of lightning but with a touch of thunder, fills the space in the story that he is meant to occupy, something one can't say of Kidman, who rattles around.

And, as so often is true in these global-destruction thrillers, there's a cozy point to it all. The fate of mankind hangs in the balance, but the whole threat has been arranged so that the two principals can, as they used to say, meet cute. Clooney and Kidman don't actually do much romantic stuff en route, but it's clear that if they live (and this is never really in question), they are going to get together. Which the ending implies. Lucky mankind, to have helped arrange that coupling.

Here are a few of the fantasy touches in this lingo-freighted, pseudo-accurate hoopla. A car chase in Vienna puts Clooney at the wheel of a fleeing car, with Kidman as passenger, and he scoots down narrow streets and makes sudden turns as if he knew the city better than his pursuers. He smashes into cars, he shoots and is shot at, and not only do Kidman and he survive unscratched, but no passerby is injured. What's even more magical, not one person in this busy daytime city ever looks around to wonder at all the shooting and smashing.

And what about that immaculate white blouse that Kidman suddenly wears in Turkey? Whence came it? And who was the hair stylist who accompanied her on her intercontinental chase?

Matters like these are worth considering, not because they are risible but because they are not immediately so, which testifies to the near-diabolical power of film. The basic means of the art is photography, a process that, for all its trickeries, is a species of proof. The probative element may evanesce rather quickly, but it's always present at the moment of encounter with a photograph. So everything that appears on the screen passes through a baptism of credibility, however briefly. Except for animated films, this applies to everything on screen—outer space, inner space, dreams, figures fifty feet tall or fifty millimeters short. The Vienna car chase is ridiculous, but because it's *photographed*, it takes a while, maybe ten seconds, before its silliness becomes clear. And that ten seconds' advantage belongs to the film art alone. This advantage licenses a lot of nonsense, but at least when the job is handled deftly, as it is here, we can get a chuckle out of seeing realism seduced into romance.

The deftness comes here from the director, Mimi Leder. This is her first feature, and she handles it surely, incisively. (Only one unfortunate choice. The climactic scene is in a large New York church near the U.N., and there's a large crucifix in the background—a war-movie cliché touch.) Leder is hugely helped by the cinematographer, Dietrich Lohmann, who knows how to use color with helpful restraint. He keeps the whole palette controlled without losing any values.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

In and Out. *Only if you want to see how homosexuality has been completely ingested as a Hollywood subject. Otherwise, a routine assembly-line farce. (Reviewed 10/20/97)* **In the Company of Men.** *Neil LaBute's debut film sparkles with bright dialogue and precise acting—and cruelty. Modeled on Restoration comedy, a present-day prank of two men on a woman reveals hidden aspects of all concerned. (9/1/97)* **Mrs. Brown.** *Did or didn't Queen Victoria have a lengthy affair with her Scottish groom John Brown? No answer here, but a lot of well-acted, well-designed enjoyment. (8/4/97)* **A Self-Made Hero.** *An impostor in occupied France floats his way to success and discloses curious aspects of his country's wartime behavior. (9/22/97)*—**SK**

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But neither Leder nor Lohmann nor both can make Kidman convincing.

In 1968, we got a cinema-verité documentary called *David Holzman's Diary*. A young man of that name used a camera instead of a pen and notebook to record his life from day to day—work, loves, etc. And after this seventy-four-minute film had persuaded us that a new form of diary had arrived, there was a snapper. Just before the finish, it was revealed that Holzman was an actor and that the entire film was the creation of a director named Jim McBride. I read later that, when this picture was shown at a German festival, the audience was enraged to learn that it had been hoaxed and nearly rioted.

No riot will follow any showing of **Forgotten Silver** (First Run). No concluding titles tell us that we have been hoaxed. This New Zealand documentary purports to announce the discovery of a forgotten filmmaker in that country who made at least one masterpiece, *Salome*, which has just been found, restored, and exhibited. Everything is done and said with an air of portentous reticence, generous samples of the lost genius's work are included, and (a device used in Woody Allen's *Zelig*) some well-known figures testify to the reality of the report.

In a way there's a small analogy here with *The Peacemaker*. The factuality of *Forgotten Silver*, and even of the film bits that have been manufactured as manifests of lost genius, have the authority of existence *on film* to persuade us. It's only when we find a cranny in our heads to ask questions and make comparisons that our credulousness falters. (That Vienna car chase in the thriller; in *Forgotten Silver* the huge city built deep in the mountains as a set for *Salome*.) Without that peek around the edge—there are several opportunities—some who see this film may come away believing it.

It's all the clever fabrication of Peter Jackson and Costa Botes and was made for New Zealand television. Presumably some of their commentary was heard at home as a wry joke, for instance when they call their rediscovered hero one of the lost greats in their country's film history. This is a large statement for a small history. New Zealand, with only three and a half million people, has inched slowly into the world's film consciousness, and it's against the smallness of its film history that the sly joke of *Forgotten Silver* really registers. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

The Decline of High Culture

"I do not believe that it is a necessary effect of democratic social conditions and of democratic institutions to diminish the number of those who cultivate the fine arts, but these causes exert a powerful influence on the manner in which these arts are cultivated.... The productions of artists are more numerous, but the merit of each production is diminished.... In aristocracies, a few great pictures are produced; in democratic countries a vast number of insignificant ones." Tocqueville wrote those words in *Democracy in America* over 150 years ago. And these Delphic notations, inscribed after a visit to our shores in the early years of the Republic by a foreigner who is still among the most prophetic commentators on American life, defined the problems that high culture would encounter in an increasingly massified and industrialized society.

Tocqueville prophesied that among the things a political democracy might have to sacrifice to egalitarian needs would be a civilization of real importance. American culture, in his view, might be flooded with insignificant forms of expression, genuine works of art being rare and often unacknowledged; and artistic standards would be determined not by the the intrinsic quality of the art but by the extrinsic size of the audience. Put another way, the evolution of American culture would be based on a continuing tension, and later a state of hostility, between the minority expression called high art—subscribed to by a decreasing number of "fastidious consumers"—and what constituted the culture of the masses.

Tocqueville, though an aristocrat himself, was extremely partial to the political experiment being tested in this country. But he yearned for a system that could join a democratic politics with a meritocratic culture. He felt that, without access to the civilizing influence of great art, the voting majority in this country was likely to remain benighted.

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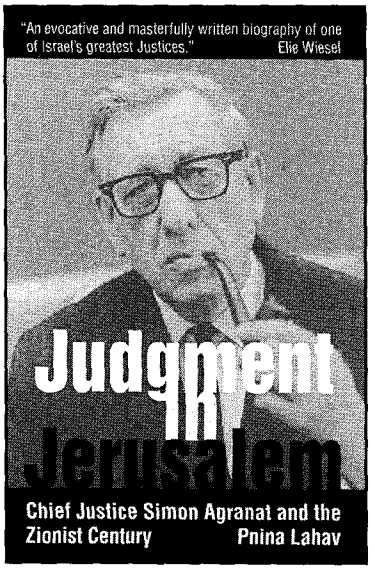
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Only art and education could provide the synthesis needed to evolve a more enlightened electorate. There were times when this synthesis looked achievable. In the nineteenth century, high art and popular culture seemed to coexist in healthy if often separate compartments. Hawthorne and Emerson were traded in the same bookstalls as penny dreadfuls, and traveling troupes performed Shakespeare (albeit in bowdlerized form), attracting wildly enthusiastic audiences from the most primitive frontiers. (So, too, did Oscar Wilde on his famous lecture tour across America.)

Even in the more embattled modern era, high art and popular culture managed to enjoy a brief honeymoon. Serious American artists in the first half of this century drew great infusions of energy from indigenous American forms. Try to imagine Gershwin without the music of the Harlem Renaissance, or Copland without Mexican and Latin American dance rhythms, or Bernstein without jazz, cabaret, and rock. T.S. Eliot's metrics, like those of e.e. cummings, owe a lot to vaudeville and the music hall, though the results may not always suit contemporary taste. (*Sweeney Agonistes* climaxes in a minstrel show.) And many twentieth-century American novels, beginning with John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, have been deeply indebted, in their structure and their sweep, to the movies. It is also obvious that Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Roy Lichtenstein, among other Pop artists, have been obligated to such popular visual forms as cartoons, comic strips, newspaper print, and advertising.

Of course, the channels of exchange have flowed the other way as well. Neither American advertising nor the world of fashion would have produced many original ideas had they not been able to loot the iconography of high art. Similarly, the history of the movies would be impoverished had studios not been in a position to feed off contemporary literature and theater. So intimate were the relations between high and popular culture, in fact, that it was sometimes difficult to determine whether an artist such as Andy Warhol belonged more to bohemia or to suburbia, whether his true home was the Factory or the creative department of a fashionable advertising firm. Writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Nathanael West, among many other American writers, spent almost as much time huddling in script conferences in Hollywood as bending over their writing desks.

The interdependence of popular art and high art in our country had positive and negative effects. One obvious advantage was economic. The commercial system subsidized a lot of needy artists whose customary royalties would have been too meager to pay for their typewriter ribbons. It is true that the same system often distracted these artists from their legitimate work, though not so much as commonly assumed. Fitzgerald wasted his time writing third-rate movies such as *Winter Carnival*, but his studio experience also inspired a fine if unfinished Hollywood novel, *The Last Tycoon*. It can be argued that working with such popular forms as the detective novel, science fiction, and film noir screenplays provided a stream of energy that kept high culture hard-boiled, vigorous, and vital.

Still, the relationship between the artist and the commodity culture was always uneasy. And it soon began to curdle, partly through the efforts of a number of highbrow intellectuals who regarded the participating artist as a sell-out or, worse, a collaborator in a mass art that was leaving a brutalizing imprint on American minds.

The fear that popular culture would absorb high art has worried social commentators since Tocqueville. Yet the fear intensified considerably during the culture wars of the 1950s. Such crusading highbrows as Dwight Macdonald began protesting the power of "Masscult" and "Midcult" to debase and overshadow "High Cult." (Even Macdonald's terms were infected by the mass media, and reflected the glib, clipped jargon of *Time* magazine where, along with other intellectuals such as James Agee, he made his living.) Particularly incensed by the way James Gould Cozzens's *By Love Possessed* had been overestimated by the middlebrow press, Macdonald was typical of those irascible critics who not only identified and analyzed high art, but also elected themselves to expose pretense and sham. At the same time, the increasingly vocal opponents of the highbrows, usually representatives of the value-free social sciences, were defending middle- and mass-culture as the more democratic art. And more democratic it was, if you measured culture by statistical rather than qualitative criteria—namely, the incidence and the popularity of the commodities consumed by the mass public.

To be sure, a democratic American art was also the dream of great poets such as Whitman. But it was somehow easier for a nineteenth-century artist to imagine "Democratic Vistas" without relinquishing his belief in artistic standards. That balance is much more difficult today. The cultural wars of the '50s, raging in such periodicals as *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*, not only planted wedges between high, middle, and popular culture, it also revived a traditional hostility against serious art and the critical intellect.

This eventually spread to include the whole construct of Eurocentric civilization and its "dead white male" artists and intellectuals. We had entered a time when competing special interest groups were beginning to clamor for recognition of their own forms of cultural expression, often identifying both traditional and avant-garde art as "elitist" (the populist epithet that was henceforth to control the terms of this debate). The charge of "elitism" was hurled not only against the wealthy consumers of art but also against its often penniless creators, thus confusing position with talent, class with taste, economic status with artistic vision.

You were elitist if you created works of art and you were elitist if you bought them. No wonder so few people were willing to come to the defense of elitism (a significant exception being the late William Henry III). Love of art was perceived in some quarters as indifference to suffering, inequality, and injustice. This implication of callousness (and more specifically, of racism) caused a major retreat: the surrender of many of the standards and the values that make a serious culture possible. I do not mean to suggest that highly gifted artists are no longer able to function in America. The problem is that what was once a more hospitable climate for their work has turned mean and indifferent. Native talent may be as abundant as ever, but never in my memory has it been so inadequately evaluated, published, produced, disseminated, and supported.

Although the ongoing war on culture originally had economic causes related to the recession, its thrust has now become mainly political. Forces opposing the high arts advance by means of a three-pronged incursion—from the right, the left, and the center of the political spectrum, all claiming endorsement from the majority. A recent headquarters for these incursions is the National Endowment for the Arts—which is sad, since in its early years this agency did a lot to maintain and encourage creative achievement. Under the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, when the NEA was led by Roger Stevens, then by Nancy Hanks, the total budget never rose above $100 million; the agency was not yet conspicuous enough to attract political interest. After the Carter administration appointed the populist Livingston Biddle as chairman, however, the emphasis of the Endowment changed from the support of serious American art to its "dissemination"—which is to say, it shifted from the artist to the public.

After the NEA budget began to inch toward its high in 1992 of $176 million (from which dizzying height it has taken such a serious dive), Congress began

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to make serious inroads into the decisions of the Endowment. Biddle explained his populist stance by announcing that "the voice of the constituent is the one most clearly heard by Congress," which was his way of saying that instead of supporting the artist, the NEA was now courting the voter and those who represented him. In short, the National Endowment for the Arts, in company with its sister agency the National Endowment for the Humanities, was in the process of being "democratized."

But this process went beyond the intervention of pressure groups, vested interests, and political pork-barrellers. It was the very politics of American democracy that was now influencing the policies and the appointments of these federal agencies. Once fully professional and oriented toward the artist, the Endowments were beginning to spread their meager moneys among educationalists, audiences, and amateurs. This change was inspired by the essentially political assumption that any resources derived from the taxpayer's pocketbook should be distributed according to the taxpayer's preferences—as if there were not enough precedents, in medical, space, and scientific research, for professionals identifying and supporting those best qualified to make advances in specialized fields. The concept of excellence and expertise—Tocqueville's meritocratic achievement within a democratic society—was perfectly harmonious with our founding ideals. (Indeed, it informed the constitutional concept of an Electoral College, originally planned as a group of qualified and informed people chosen by the voting majority to select the chief executive.) Yet this concept was now being abandoned in favor of such extra-artistic concerns as advocacy, arts appreciation, geographical distribution, dissemination through the media, and, later, multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

The democratization of the Endowment—more accurately, its politicization—exploded with full force after President Bush appointed John E. Frohnmayer as its chairman. It was then that controversial grants to Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano and others aroused the wrath of such conservative bullies as Senator Helms, who took the position that the government should not fund any artistic work offensive to the majority. Such was Helms's power that he persuaded Congress to impose content restrictions on grantees in the form of a new obscenity clause that all applicants were obliged to sign, though a successful class action suit by Bella Lewitzky later resulted in the provision being struck down as unconstitutional.

Frohnmayer not only punished those institutions responsible for the Mapplethorpe and Serrano shows, he also cancelled a grant for a New York art exhibit because he found the brochure too political. (It was critical of legislators like Helms.) Frohnmayer's temporary successor, Anne-Imelda Radice, was, if anything, even more responsive to right-wing pressures on the arts. Despite her desire to placate the conservatives, however, it was in her brief tenure that populist policies gained the greatest purchase at the Endowment—an inheritance that the current chairwoman, Jane Alexander, has been in no position to reverse. First Radice declared that the agency would henceforth be more responsive to majoritarian or popular demands when dispensing grants, thus tainting the originally counter-market strategy of the NEA with marketplace values. Then she made it NEA policy to fund every species of ethnic and racial expression, regardless of its value as art.

The attack on the arts from the politically correct left proved just as disturbing in its way as the attack from right-wing minions of moral correctness. And it is significant that both sides claimed the mantle of the democratic majority. For the right, this usually meant those clean-cut Americans who celebrate Thanksgiving in Norman Rockwell paintings and sip vanilla sodas in Thornton Wilder plays. For the left, the majority was represented not by church-going, Anglo-Saxon patriots but rather by all those previously excluded from the cultural banquet, a diverse mixture of racial, sexual, and ethnic constituencies whose creative work was summed up in the slogans "multiculturalism" and "cultural diversity."

Now, there is no question that intercultural exchange has been a source of great artistic refreshment. "Multicultural" grants have also helped to increase the visibility of deserving minority artists in many artistic institutions. But frequently awards have been made on other than artistic grounds, as if there were different standards for people of different colors, sexes, or ethnicities. Such awards are less a form of patronage than of patronization, reflecting not so much a love of art as a passion for social engineering. As Mencken wrote: "Every third American devotes himself to improving and lifting up his fellow citizens, usually by force; the messianic delusion is our national disease." Trying to compensate for the failures of society in an area least prepared to be an avenue of social change, namely the arts, the cultural bureaucrats began to threaten hard-won achievements for the sake of evangelical gestures.

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Ezenwa-Ohaeto

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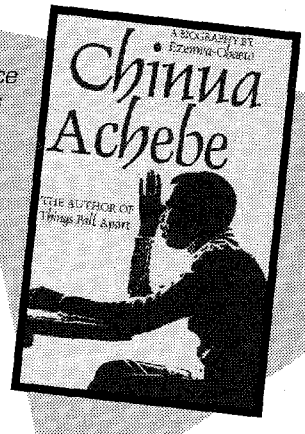

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Finally, there is the assault on the high arts from the middle of the spectrum—more accurately, the middlebrow arbiters of culture, those vigilant watchdogs who bark at anything not immediately familiar to the middle-class public. With artistic standards being controlled by media critics, many of them incompetent, and publication and production controlled by publishers and producers hypnotized by the bottom line, the possibility of sustaining high culture in our time is becoming increasingly problematical. Serious book stores are losing their franchise; small publishing houses are closing shop; little magazines are going out of business; nonprofit theaters are surviving primarily by commercializing their repertory; symphony orchestras are diluting their programs; public television is increasing its dependence on reruns of British sitcoms; classical radio stations are dwindling; museums are resorting to blockbuster shows; dance is dying. Only opera is increasing its audience. And the academy, once the last refuge of the highbrow intellectual, is becoming captive to agenda-driven departments more and more dedicated not to teaching works of intellect or appreciating works of art, but to forcing political ideas into them, like stuffing a healthy goose in order to enlarge its liver.

This incorrigible tendency by right, left, and center to muddle culture and politics has had the result of altering the terms of the cultural debate. Certainly, the traditional arguments between high-cult and mass-cult could not be heard today; serious and popular culture no longer coexist in their separate compartments. The once proud and confident highbrow has fled the field, pursued by a hail of arrows shaped in the form of epithets, while the serious artist finds it harder and harder to resist the pressures of popular taste. Has Tocqueville been confirmed in his belief that a meritocratic art cannot survive in a democratic society? He was certainly right that the relationship will always cause tensions. Each age chooses different weapons for its war on the serious arts, but the nature of the war remains the same. •

Boogie Nights

BY TERRY CASTLE

Casanova: The Man Who Really Loved Women
by Lydia Flem
translated by Catherine Temerson
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 272 pp., $24)

History of My Life
by Giacomo Casanova, Chevalier de Seingalt
translated by Willard R. Trask
(Johns Hopkins University Press, six double vols., $15.95 each)

Might one beg, with trepidation, to differ on Casanova? On the face of it, he seems like the perfect '90s guy. Unlike his strange coeval the Marquis de Sade, Casanova (1725-1798) was sexy but not scary. Of the hundreds of female conquests commemorated in the twelve closely-printed volumes of erotic memoirs that he composed at the end of his life, not one ended up garrotted, chopped up into little pieces, hideously sodomized, or dumped in some horrid well. Indeed, like the gentlemanly seducers of today, Casanova was not only solicitous about his partner's pleasure—concerned to "perform the gentle sacrifice" without rudeness or roughness or unseemly dispatch—but careful to take hygienic precautions whenever any "voluptuous combat" was about to ensue. To minimize the risk of a "fatal plumpness" in his lovers, he tells us, he never hesitated to wear a "little garment of very fine, transparent skin, eight inches long, closed at one end, but resembling a purse and having at its open end a narrow pink ribbon." Way excellent!

And then there is the sex itself, which is often perverse, but in a mild *Vanity Fair*-ish sort of way. He was willing to bed almost any unattached female whom he encountered, but Casanova typically liked a little kink—numerical, sartorial, or familial. Having two women at once was good, especially if they were sisters, such as the naughty virgins Nanetta and Marta, whom he deflowered while a seminary student in his teens:

> I began with the one toward whom I was turned, not knowing whether it was Nanetta or Marta. I found her curled up and covered by her shift, but by doing nothing to startle her and proceeding step by step as gradually as possible, I soon convinced her that her best course was to pretend to be asleep and let me go on. Little by little I straightened her out, little by little she uncurled, with slow, successive, but wonderfully natural movements, she put herself in a position which was the most favorable she could offer me without betraying herself. I set to work, but to crown my labors it was necessary that she should join in them openly and undeniably, and nature finally forced her to do so. I found this first sister beyond suspicion, and suspecting the pain she must have endured, I was surprised. In duty bound religiously to respect a prejudice to which I owed a pleasure the sweetness of which I was tasting for the first time in my life, I let the victim alone and turned the other way to do the same thing with her sister, who must be expecting me to demonstrate the full extent of my gratitude.

And when only one woman was available, dressing up worked a charm. Many were the young women whom Casanova disguised as boys or "sham nuns" in order to heighten subsequent "fits of rapture." A favorite amour of the 1740s was a Bolognesean opera singer whose particular quirk was to pass herself off as a castrato. At first glimpse of the doe-eyed "Bellino," Casanova writes, he knew at once—despite the singer's silken breeches and the dainty bump at the crotch—that "he" was really a "she." "His eyes were a woman's and not a man's." But the gender-bending inflames him. After he and the singer strip down and consummate their passion, he asks her to demonstrate the "little apparatus" of gut with which she deceives those impolite enough to question her sex:

> She gets out of bed, pours water into a glass, opens her trunk, takes out her apparatus and her gums, dissolves them, and fits on the mask. I see something unbelievable. A charming girl, who looked it in every part of her body, and who, with this extraordinary attachment, seemed to me even more interesting, for the white pendant offered no obstruction to the well of her sex. I told her that she had been wise not to let me touch it, for it would have intoxicated me and made me become what I was not, unless she had instantly calmed me by revealing the truth.

So inspired is he at the sight of this adorable little fashion accessory that he immediately commences a second love "skirmish" in which both he and his curious bedmate end up "victorious."

And incest, too, never failed to please.

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Encountering an old love, one Donna Lucrezia, eighteen years after their first meeting, Casanova finds that she has a beautiful daughter, Leonilda, of whom he is the father. After telling Lucrezia that he will help with Leonilda's dowry (she is betrothed to an elderly *marchese*), he promptly gets in bed with them both and makes love first to the mother and then to the daughter:

> But the moment which brings Lucrezia to the death of love is precisely the moment when, out of consideration for her, I think it is my duty to withdraw. Leonilda, stirred to pity, with one hand helps the passage of her mother's little soul, and with the other places a white handkerchief under her father, who was ejaculating.

Twenty years later, in Prague, he accidentally encounters the handsome young Marchese della C., Leonilda's son, who is—he records with satisfaction—both his son and his grandson.

Even without the sex, however, Casanova would seem to be the ultimate user-friendly, feel-good dude. There's the gabby, talk-show host manner (with celebrity appearances by Catherine the Great, Voltaire, Pope Benedict XIV and countless others), the glitzy backdrops (Venice, Milan, Paris, Madrid, St. Petersburg, Naples), and the fact that he has been deemed great literature by various esteemed authorities. "Has any novelist or poet," gushed Edmund Wilson when Willard Trask's definitive English translation of the *History of My Life* first appeared in 1966, "ever rendered better than Casanova the passing glory of the personal life?" And V.S. Pritchett saw him as an Enlightenment culture-hero: "Casanova is unsurpassed as the re-creator of the daily talking interests of 18th-century Europe. He ranges from slut to patrician, from closet to cabinet, waterfront to palace. He is superior to all other erotic writers because of his pleasure in news, in gossip, in the whole personality of his mistresses."

Such charmingly insouciant ways, one imagines, combined with a love of fine food and wine, compulsive social climbing, and an utter lack of any moral or political conviction—he once appeared at a Milan masquerade in a gorgeously ruffled velvet suit that had been slashed in pieces and patched up with expensive silk so as to resemble the costume of a "luxury beggar"—would seem to make Casanova ideally suited to life in the late twentieth century, the eon of Starbucks, *The Kiss*, lipstick lesbians, homeless people, and gourmet cigars.

One will find nothing to contravene such rosy impressions in *The Man Who Really Loved Women*, Lydia Flem's new psychobiography of Casanova. Written in the soulful, stylized, all-in-the-present-tense mode that is much in fashion in lit-crit land these days, her book is a veritable love-poem to the sprightly snogger. He was a man "born to make people happy," she declares—a "friend and lover to women" whose overflowing memoirs are the crowning achievement of a life spent deliciously, even heroically, in a utopian quest for pleasure: "Voluptuousness becomes memory. The unending repetition of his experiences is transcended by writing. The very act of writing allows this transcendence of self. Casanova enjoys the moment, and once it slips away, he enjoys remembering the moment, a moment that is enhanced by the precious feeling of transience. His pleasure in living is perpetuated as literary pleasure." And in writing it all down—every turn, twist, and tumble—Casanova achieved "not just a deepened sense of self but also a moral meditation on existence."

Obviously this is not biography in the conventional sense. For dates, places, or a more linear approach in general, one must seek out the memoirs themselves, now reissued in six elegant paperbacks by Johns Hopkins University Press. Instead Flem offers a rambling, anecdotal meditation on certain Casanovan themes: his impoverished Venetian childhood; his idealization of his beautiful yet unavailable mother; his delight in outwitting elderly paternal figures; his rootlessness and constant search for novelty; his lifelong, often histrionic compulsion to prove he was "a boy and not a girl." The overall tone is hortatory and faintly sanctimonious: Casanova is the one whose "insolent legacy" is to show us the way to be happy.

What to do with it all? In some ways Flem's book succeeds, though not perhaps in the way its author intended. On matters non-sexual, she can be illuminating and imaginative. She points up well, for example, the psychic effects of Casanova's humble origins—he was the eldest child of Venetian *commedia* actors who abandoned him to the care of strangers for much of his childhood—and how he sought, through canny self-improvement, to undo the double stigma of low birth and neglect. Casanova might be called the first great *parvenu* of Western culture, the first to see that in the new and increasingly fluid social world of eighteenth-century Europe knowledge itself could be a ticket to fortune.

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nova managed to insinuate himself into the *haute monde* in his teens and to stay there for the rest of his life. A lifelong dabbler in history, alchemy, mathematics, and philosophy, he wrote novels, plays, and scholarly treatises, organized the national lottery in Holland, and ended his days as librarian to Count Waldstein of Bohemia. He was the first "unplaceable" man of modernity; and figures such as Napoleon, or the heroes of Stendhal and Balzac, are unimaginable without him.

Similarly, Flem highlights interestingly some of his many idiosyncrasies, such as his lifelong interest in physiology and the peculiar freaks of the body. After being arrested in Venice in 1755 for ostensibly practicing magic, he was flung into the worst of the republic's prisons, the infamous *Piombi*, or Leads, under the roof of the Doge's Palace. While waiting in an antechamber to be taken to his cell, he recalls, he experienced the contradictory urge to sleep and to micturate: "I spent four hours there during all of which I slept, waking every quarter of an hour to make water—a very strange phenomenon, for I had never suffered from strangury, the heat was excessive, and I had not supped; nevertheless I filled two large chamber pots with urine." "It had been my experience," he observes, "that surprise caused by an act of oppression produced the effect of a strong narcotic on me, but it was only now that I learned that it is highly diuretic." In later years, he prided himself on one-upping professional medical men; after hurting his hand in a duel—it had gone black with gangrene—he kept his doctor from amputating it by threatening to kill him. Unbeknownst to the physician, he had noticed that the wound was "red at the edges"—the first sign of healing. When the wound closed up altogether, he brags, he was hailed as a genius.

Still, something troubles in Flem's account, and it is not too long before one realizes that it is Casanova himself. Flem's lack of distance on "Giacomo," as she calls him—she often seems more than a little in love with him herself—means that she ends up duplicating his own triumphalist vision of himself. So thoroughly has she identified herself with Casanova's own narcissism, the root cause behind everything he said or did, that she ends up playing the role of ventriloquist's dummy to his obliging ventriloquist. The fact that a good deal of *The Man Who Really Loved Women* is composed of verbatim quotations from the *History of My Life*—each one set off, like ad copy, in "significant" italics—suggests how deeply the psychoanalyst has let herself be penetrated, so to speak, by the naughty Venetian.

The problem here is that Casanova was a severely damaged human being. Flem's claims to the contrary, he was *not* deeply interested in other people or in making them happy, especially if they were women; and in one way or another he exploited just about every person he ever met. Risible though his memoirs can be—and who would deny that in small doses they are an utterly agreeable way of wasting one's time?—they are also the record of a soul-deadening smugness and solipsism. Their significance as human testament and historical artifact is consequently limited. Far from ranking with the genuinely great autobiographies—Augustine's or Rousseau's or Frederick Douglass's or Violette Leduc's or Janet Frame's—the *History of My Life* remains in the end as emotionally impoverished, as irrevocably petty and banal, as its author was in life.

Women, of course, are at the heart of it. It's partly a matter of having no real "close-ups": the various women whom Casanova seduces—all the Teresas, Antonias, Marias, Cecilias, Amalias, and so on—blur into one another after a while. Casanova's representational style might be compared to that of his eighteenth-century contemporary, the scene painter Canaletto. Just as Canaletto's famous panoramas of Venice and London reduce human figures to identical, barely individuated flecks of color—everyone seems to be seen from the same distance, about 500 yards away—so Casanova's characters are, psychologically speaking, "seen from a distance." They tend to resolve into crude *commedia* types: fools or knaves, slatterns or seductresses, helpers or hinderers.

In the case of his lovers, this emotional distancing is particularly pronounced. At best we learn if a certain conquest is dark or fair, obliging or unwilling. When a woman reappears several times over the course of the narrative—as the incest-prone Donna Lucrezia does—the reader is often hard-pressed to recall who she is or why she originally had a claim on our attention. There is nothing of that intense cross-sex imaginative involvement that we find in Byron's descriptions of his mistresses, or in the reveries of later erotic memoirists, such as the anonymous author of the Victorian pornographic masterpiece *My Secret Life*.

Flem is convinced that there is "not a trace of misogyny in Casanova." She adduces his passionate love for his mother Zanetta—whom she calls the "*prima amorosa*" of his life—in support of this statement. Yet Zanetta, a leading lady in the Comici Italiani acting troupe, cared little for her son. He was stupid and unresponsive as a child, not speaking until he was eight, and he suffered debilitating nosebleeds from which his parents seem to have hoped (none too secretly) that he would die. After her husband's death in 1733, Zanetta left her son with strangers, decamped for Verona, St. Petersburg, and Dresden, and seldom saw him again. The nosebleeds

They Felt It Was Time

It was time to look away from the face,
brush in their right hand. Woman in light of window,
back to shadow, had wanted to say a word.

Man behind her couldn't say much
to the dog half-buried in sand; the white-shirt figure
racing himself, racing and falling.

All turned away
to go fast by and by, and went fast. Glad not having
to see the look on somebody's face:

active genetic landscape glancing—expression
being too painful to see,
over if loving.

It will end. This you saw in the knife of the tongue,
the woman's desperate lantern. Then:

They painted a black canvas. An unbearable, bright shine.
Three mathematical, shadowed shapes. A perfectly straight line.

Elizabeth Macklin

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only ceased when Casanova's grandmother took him to a witch in Murano, who locked him in a chest for several hours and effectively scared them out of him. He learned to talk soon after, and immediately impressed everyone around him—he boasts—with his suddenly-revealed brilliance and precocity.

Flem suggests that these childhood experiences, resulting in a never-to-be-relinquished hope of pleasing an absent mother, prompted what she calls Casanova's extraordinary "generosity" as a lover:

> Never to harm a mistress, never to arouse her anger or disappointment, never to make her suffer from their affair in any way—this is what he consistently aspires to. Giacomo would never forgive himself for tormenting a woman with the slightest hint of tragedy. Though on several occasions he sincerely plans to marry a lover, he can never bring himself to give up his freedom. He knows he would make a bad husband. He dodges the law or only pretends to submit to it, he laughs at authority and religion, but he respects his women friends and he is careful not to be at fault where they are concerned.... There is nothing he dreads more than seeing a woman become his enemy.

Courtesy Johns Hopkins University Press

GIACOMO CASANOVA AT AGE 25, BY FRANCESCO CASANOVA

Yet the memoirs sometimes tell a less pleasant story. They show a lifelong ambivalence toward women that sometimes issued in vengeful furies. After La Charpillon, a courtesan in London, steadily refuses his advances, he is at first violent (he tries to rape her), then suicidal, until he has the gratifying idea of placing a parrot that he has trained to say "Miss Charpillon is more of a whore than her mother" among the milling throngs at the Royal Exchange. In Aix, in 1768, he becomes enraged by a 14-year-old peasant girl who has the misfortune to hold herself in the "wrong posture" while he is trying to copulate with her: he should have "beaten her," he repines, "as I had done to one of her sort in Venice twenty-five years earlier." And whenever he is laid low with venereal disease—a not infrequent occurrence in these volumes—he typically reviles the unlucky woman he believes to have infected him: numerous are the outbursts in these memoirs against the "whores," "wretches," and "she-monsters" who have passed on to him the Paphian disorder. (How many of them, one wonders, caught it from him?) Needless to say, he inevitably presumes his reader to be another jaded man of the world, like himself.

Granted, Casanova's usual way of relating his (real? made-up?) sexual adventures is droll. Thus he has the faux-castrato "Bellino" declare after their tryst, "I did not become truly a woman until I tasted the perfect pleasure of love in your arms." But his women remain soulless, because he has no access to souls. He responds only to surfaces, fabrics, sheens, integuments. In this crippling absence of insight—in this lack of sensibility—Casanova shows himself, paradoxically, to have been grossly out of sync with the tendencies of his epoch. For the great imaginative discovery of the eighteenth century was female inwardness: the uncharted inner psychic realm of women's desires and fears, aspirations and antipathies.

This discovery was registered in the lives of real women: in the fiercely unsentimental poems and letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; in the grand social experiments of powerful *salonnières* such as Anne Thérèse de Lambert, Madame du Deffand, Julie de Lespinasse, and Suzanne Necker; in the moral, intellectual, and polemical ardors of Mary Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouges, Bettina von Arnim, and Germaine de Staël. Above all, the discovery was registered in the newly emerging genre of the novel, which was the first literary form of Western civilization to devote itself to female dream-space.

Casanova, as he tells us himself, disliked novels; even when desperate for books, while imprisoned in the Leads, he refused the novels offered him by a sympathetic prison guard. Perhaps they hit a little too close to home. For the great cultural task of the novel has been, from its beginning, to announce the end of libertinism. Not its literal end, of course. In Samuel Richardson's massive and magnificent *Clarissa* (1747-48), a novel with some claim to being the greatest piece of prose fiction ever written, the anguished heroine is first sexually humiliated, then destroyed, by a Casanova-like seducer. And Richardson's handling of his tragic story in no way precludes sympathy for the villain; the seducer, Lovelace, is in many ways as noble, gifted, and heartbreaking a figure as the heroine. Still, what Richardson also makes stunningly clear, and this is the source of the cathartic pity and fear that his novel evokes, is Lovelace's absolute and utter moral obsolescence. When women have souls, libertines become *de trop*.

Was Casanova really "the man who really loved women"? Such designations can only be tendentious, whether advanced by men or women. (Perhaps women are better judges of the matter, but to say that is not to say very much at all.) Still, reading Flem, and reading Casanova himself, one is tempted to try to take the question seriously. Certainly there are other men, of Casanova's time and after, to whom the label may more fittingly apply. Mozart cherished his wife Constanze to the death, even as his operas explore the theme of faithfulness in love with ravishing and sometimes agonizing honesty. The tender, virile, and lovable personality of Keats comes across in every word he wrote, but most unerringly in the letters to Fanny Brawne. And even in our own ghastly

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century, there is Joyce, who in a spectacular imaginative collusion with the feminine—as *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* bear out—found a permanent and glorious vitalization of his art.

In the 1950s, during the great intellectual renewal of interest in France and elsewhere in the writings of the Marquis de Sade, Simone de Beauvoir wrote a famous essay entitled "Must We Burn Sade?" We should not wish to "burn" Casanova (or Sade, for that matter). If knowing something about the eighteenth century and its extraordinary artistic, cultural, and political legacy has become a mark of civility in the twentieth century, then Casanova tells us something we desperately need to know. He will never go out of style as long as we retain a curiosity about the past, about the vicissitudes of the erotic, about the tragicomic collisions of male and female.

And, it must be said, Casanova holds a mirror up to our own age, too. The fact that he is back in fashion, in glossy covers, tells us something about the hollowness of our moment, in which superficiality reigns and a little "glamour" can take the edge off the abominable. Casanova's admiring reception in certain quarters—Clive James recently anointed him a "great man" and "a kind of genius" in *The New Yorker*—suggests how profoundly the contemporary mood of self-congratulation and chic boredom has taken root. He'd make a great talking head, of course. That has never been in question. But we need not love him either, even when we are told that he loves us.

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Oy Gevalt!

BY ALFRED KAZIN

The Old Religion by David Mamet

(The Free Press, 194 pp., $24)

"He doesn't like to be away too far from his rabbi," a friend explained as David Mamet rushed off from a cocktail party at which he had been an unaccommodating guest. I knew Mamet as an insatiable dramatist of the subtlest urban crookedness, and was not prepared for so much "religious" attachment. But I hadn't yet read *The Old Religion*, a clever but maddeningly nationalistic recasting of the Leo Frank case. It is a terrible work of Jewish jingoism.

Leo Frank (1884-1915) was a Jewish businessman who was born in Texas and had lived briefly in New York. In 1913 he was in Atlanta, an executive in his uncle's pencil factory. On a Saturday—it was the Confederate Memorial Day—Frank was alone in his office when a young white employee named Mary Phagan was raped and murdered. Although a black laborer was reported to have been carrying the girl's body, the laborer's own accusation of Frank as the murderer was enough to have Frank sentenced to death. After Georgia's governor destroyed himself politically by commuting the sentence to life imprisonment, a mob dragged Frank out of his cell, castrated him, and lynched him. A photo of the body hanging from a tree (one boy is grinning at the camera) was reproduced as a postcard and sold for many years in stores throughout the South.

The man who was really responsible for Leo Frank's murder was the ex-Populist demagogue Tom Watson (1856-1922), a rabid hater of Jews, blacks, and Catholics, who could never forgive himself for having been too young to fight in the Civil War. In the Georgia legislature Watson doggedly fought the state's Democratic machine, which was in the hands of capitalists, many from out of the state, who were bringing industries to Georgia. Watson saw himself as an agrarian reformer, unable to renounce his vision of the South's imagined glories before the war. He served in Congress for one term, twice failed to be re-elected, and gave up politics for rabble-rousing in magazines blatantly called *Tom Watson's Magazine* and *Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine*.

Watson was a mentally violent politician embittered by being out of office. He was domineering by nature, and he wrote biographies of Napoleon and Jefferson so as to conflate himself with them. Leo Frank was a natural target for him. He was a "New York Jew," and he was allied with a hateful new factory in Georgia. Blacks were already so suspect and such accustomed victims (in 1906 Atlanta had suffered one of the worst race riots in American history) that Watson saw a priceless new opportunity for political advancement in getting the mob to threaten Jews in particular. He openly threatened to destroy Frank if the death sentence was overturned on appeal.

It was just when the case was being appealed that Watson launched his anti-Semitic campaign against Frank. Jews were relatively few, understandably timid in confronting the religious prejudices against Jews that sprouted everywhere in Ku Klux Klan country. Every week *Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine* screamed for the execution of "the filthy, perverted Jew of New York." Watson helped to found the "Knights of Mary Phagan," an anti-Semitic society which sought to organize a boycott of Jewish stores and businesses throughout Georgia. Along with Frank, Jews as a group were under attack. Many fled.

Tom Watson does not appear in *The Old Religion*. There is nothing here of the actual perjured testimony that led to the death sentence. Not a word of the mass panic that seized Atlanta's Jews. Not a hint that Southerners up to our day looked back so fondly to Jefferson's agrarian republic as paradise lost that they had to abominate everything and everyone contrary to the myth of their natural superiority. What we get in Mamet's little book is more drama than novel. A novel would have to show the social context that helps to explain Frank's undoing.

But the drama here, in Mamet's clever theatrical style of people echoing each other as they talk in snatches, is almost entirely within. It is historically contextless. There is no straight line of narrative. Everything proceeds in fragments of memory, gulps of dialogue. When other people speak, they do so largely in Frank's memories and reflections. The theater is poor Frank's own mind, before and after he is incarcerated. He is essentially the only mind operating in the story. If there were Jews elsewhere in Georgia who had the courage to help him, they do not exist for Mamet.

Frank's aloneness is more than a dramatic situation. It enables Mamet to make a coarse and grandiose indictment. *The Old Religion* accuses the American legal system, and the Gentile world, of assisting in Frank's destruction. Mamet wants to emphasize Frank's growing recognition that his alienation from his

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surroundings is total and inevitable. This Jew is a victim, nothing but a victim in the long, long line of victims murdered only because they were Jews. The "novel" is thus personalized, introverted, and fragmented—it jumps here, jumps there—to present Frank solely as the interiority that Mamet believes is the essence of a Jew.

There is nothing rounded, externalized, historicized to show the horror and the terror that Frank had to live with in jail before he was dragged out of his cell, mutilated, and hung from that tree. Why does his wife not visit him in jail? Where is his uncle and business partner Morris? What we have ominously to deal with here, as the doomed Frank himself does, is only his simplified consciousness of being a Jew—or, as Mamet has it when the rabbi enters his cell, of *becoming* a Jew, so that he can face his annihilation properly, with an authentic Jew's contempt for his murderers.

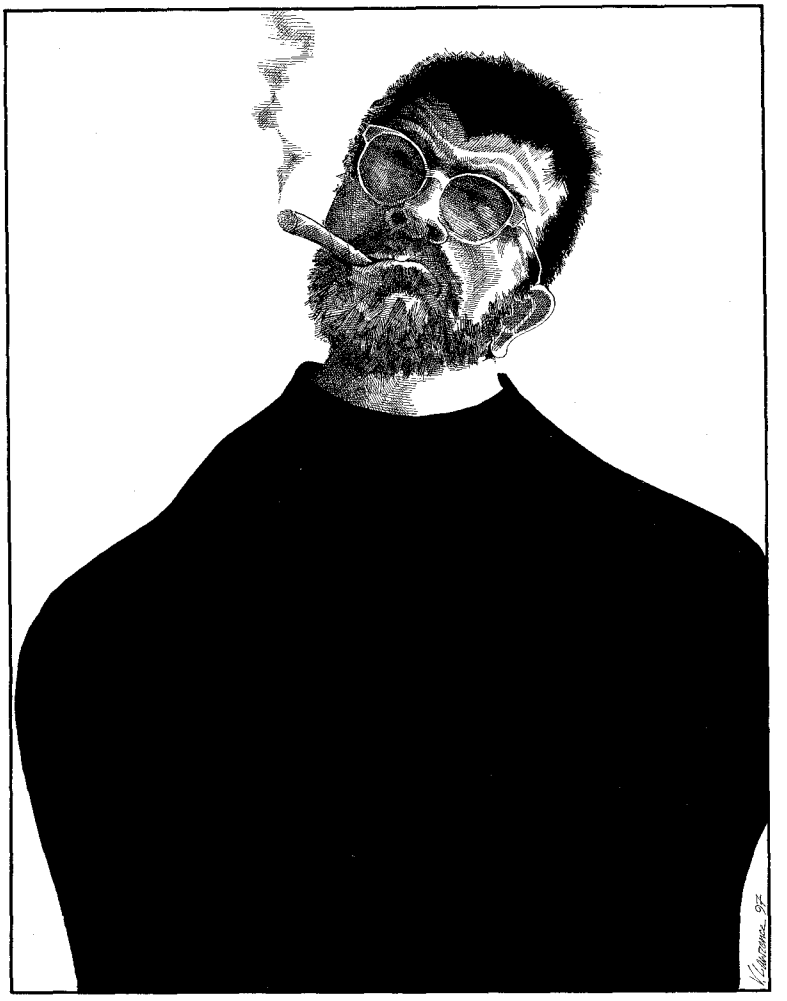
This first part of the tale, before we suddenly switch to Frank in a cell, is tenderly satiric about the bourgeois illusions and the shallow contentment of Frank, his uncle, and their associated families. They smile at the story of a Jew whose instinctive fear even before the Frank trial got him to run away from Atlanta, only to be caught at the railroad station by *them*, who assured him that "You're *our* Jew."

Mamet then puts up warning signs. There intrudes the memory of a Jewish child in nineteenth-century Bologna secretly baptized by his nurse, and then claimed forever by the Church as its own. Frank comes across an old newspaper clipping on the Mortara case. "The child was kidnapped by the state—taken from his parents' home. No diplomatic or religious pressure was sufficient to induce the government of Spain or the Catholic church to give the child back." Why Spain? Bologna is not in Spain. And the poor boy was kidnapped not in 1854, as Mamet writes, but in 1858. Also, Mary Phagan was murdered not in 1915, as Mamet writes, but in 1913.

Then, as Frank sits at the Passover Seder, he is irritated by a discourse about what is kosher and what is not. "What a show it all is," he thinks. "I find this ludicrous.... An amusement of slaves—calls itself philosophy." On Sunday morning, neighbors all at church, he compliments himself: "Our *happiness* comes from the limits we impose ... ": "Was ever a man in such a happy position as this?" He notes that the excellent Havana that he is smoking can be identified with the sudden prosperity of the Jew. Is he tempting fate? His thoughts about his wife, who is getting fat, are not kind.

Frank in jail is, on the whole, surprisingly calm. If there are people outside his prison howling for his blood, he (and we) do not seem to know it. And in fact Mamet will not allow there to be such people. His paranoid vision of the non-Jewish world absolves him, he seems to think, of the novelist's duty to create real people, even unattractive or evil ones. Frank must be alone in the most terrible aloneness—unable (as yet) to acknowledge that he does not know why he has been chosen for this fate. For this is certainly an affair of chosenness.

Frank will not fully "get it" until a rabbi is allowed into his cell. What does a Jew sentenced to death only because he is a Jew do with this rabbi, apparently his only visitor? He practices his Hebrew, he plays kabbalistical games with English letters, he hears from the rabbi that Christians who believe in personal salvation just childishly play with words. "The difference is here: *Abraham* did not kill his son. *Their* God did." Frank learns a large meta-historical truth: that Christians are not to be trusted by Jews, who must be stalwart not so much in their faith as in their identity. And neither is the American government to be trusted by the Jews. "He saw that they did not want him and despised his efforts to belong. He saw that, to them, he would always be a Jew. And that all his ratiocination regarding assimilation was, to them, pathetic." The United States promises that its law will give citizens safety and security, but this is a deceit. "He was The Jew, and that was the end of it."



DAVID MAMET BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

What, then, can be trusted by The Jew awaiting death at the hands of the hatred that surrounds a Jew? The old religion. But what is the old religion, if not the persistence in it? Though they slay me, I am proud to be a Jew. Mamet's Judaism is nothing but a way of dying. The rabbi talks of prayers making you happy when you have completed saying them, but there is strikingly no talk of a God to believe in. The tradition is all—but the tradition seems to consist only of other Jewish victims. "[A] nomadic people have only each other. That is their home." Also: " 'How can those,' he thought, 'who are not Jews understand Jews?' " As a Jew, Mamet is a pessimist, a revanchist, a martyrologist. The force of the Jewish chauvinism in this book is enough to sanctify every settler evicting every Palestinian from "Judea and Samaria."

The rabbi tells Frank that "in linking salvation—whatever that might be—to faith, one sets oneself the simplest of tasks and, upon its completion, awards oneself Godhood." And "how could that feel otherwise than good?... To have illicit sex, or rape, or murder, sanctioned by Authority, that felt good too. 'Any idolatry,' the Rabbi said, 'that is the

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force which sent you here.' These saved folk have been convened these two thousand years to kill and hate and call it good."

What comfort this must have brought Frank in his cell!

I think that David Mamet should get himself another rabbi.

ALFRED KAZIN's new book *God and the American Writer* has just been published by Knopf.

Family Values.com

BY ANN HULBERT

The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap by Seymour Papert

(Longstreet Press, 211 pp., $22.95)

A family that clicks together sticks together. My son has his hand on the mouse as we sit side by side in front of the computer screen, exploring the Internet. Inspired by Seymour Papert's book, I have been trying to make computer use in our house a more communal endeavor. My son isn't just double-clicking on the mouse as we try another Brady Anderson search on the World Wide Web. He is quintuple-clicking, as though he is drumming his fingers. I sympathize with his impatience, because this surfing is slow business and, after visiting several sites in vain (he wants a photo of his baseball hero), it is easy to feel on edge. But all the clicking is driving me slightly crazy, and I am afraid it is about to make the computer freeze. Papert has told me how I could be making constructive use of this lag. As we await the graphics, my child and I could try to figure out, say, why it takes so long by calculating how fast the bits are transmitting, how many pixels there are in a picture, how many bits it takes to make a pixel. But he is too distracted, and so am I. I wish he would lay off the mouse.

Instead his fingers keep us dancing from site to site, the computer doesn't freeze, and eventually a small picture of Brady materializes: he is in mid-swing, his face twisted in a grimace that makes him nearly unrecognizable. My son prints it, but I'm not surprised when he logs off and leaves the page behind. Again, with Papert in mind, I think to myself, why, my child could assemble a baseball "book," gathering pictures, statistics, and other information from the Web; and he could then weave them together to display on our computer. His Oriole-fanatic friends would love it.

I am no "cyberostrich," and I now have an idea of how to go about such a "Web exploration project," thanks to Papert's how-to example of a girl at work creating a collage of sea turtles for her grandmother. I am also aware that executing the idea would require at least two double-headers' worth of time, since the joy of this computer work/play, as Papert says, is that you proceed by trial and error. And we would be interrupted, of course: my son would want to play catch, go to his baseball practice, get to his Little League game, buy some baseball cards, to say nothing of go to school, eat, sleep, do his homework. I drop the computer collage idea, feeling vaguely guilty toward my child and acutely aware that I have let Papert down.

We are precisely the type of people whom Papert has in mind as he dispenses his advice on how to become "the connected family." (A pioneering proponent of computers as tools for learning, Papert has what a lot of children would consider the most idyllic-sounding job title in the world: he holds the Lego Chair for Learning Research at MIT.) That is, we are computer-equipped but not computer-enlightened; I could be the "zillionth mother who asked [Papert]... what the children should do with [the computer] at what ages and which was the best software." Even more important, we are, for good and ill, a classic Spockian family, and Papert acknowledges Dr. Spock as a main inspiration for this book.

It is not simply that Papert mimics the master in his congenially intimate, plainspoken, and reassuring style. ("I want to reassure parents about psychological as well as technical matters.... Your intuitive sense of people and your own experience are rich mines of psychological knowledge. A lot of what I have to say is really aimed at helping you feel confident enough to use what you know.") Papert subscribes to deeper Spockian principles as well. He is writing for parents reared on the doctor's wisdom that "you know more than you think you do," and that your child knows even more. Given the right attentive, child-centered surroundings, your child will prove a naturally energetic, well-balanced guide of his own growth, which you can follow and learn from with pleasure.

For Papert, this translates into a new deference and devotion to the natural computer prowess of children, a solicitous stance that can help to liberate and to unite us all. The young "know they can master [the computer] more easily and more naturally than their parents," and with some help from Papert—who is himself "the emancipated child," according to Nicholas Negroponte's foreword—we can learn with them how to make the most of this unprecedented technological opportunity. Corporate and commercial pressures alone need not shape the future of computers. Families can bring more creative vision to bear on their developing use, and in what are now lackluster schools and lackadaisical homes, soon "every learner will be special—the dream of every progressive educator."

Papert's bedside manner can be trying, even for veterans of Spockian solicitude. He is a honey-voiced expert so concerned not to sound high-handed to his readers that he often fails to notice that he is talking down to them. "It may seem to be an awesome task to rethink and rebuild our ideas about children and how to deal with them. It will certainly require some work. But it is the task we have to face, and facing it one step at a time is not really awesome at all," he soothes his class of computer dunces. "I shall offer you an approach to it that may sometimes be a little hard but will also be enjoyable. Using language I have learned from children engaged with computers, it is hard fun." He enlists children as his teaching assistants, offering them this advice on how to handle their learning-disabled elders: "hold their hand. Hug them—but don't do it in a condescending way." Most kids, in their wisdom, can be counted on to gag at the suggestion.

It is tempting to accuse Papert of soft romanticism, of hopeless idealism. But what is most childlike about him turns out to be, surprisingly enough, his innocent realism. Just how hard the fun will be to manage is the daunting revelation of this purportedly reassuring book. To be sure, skepticism about a golden

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computer future just around the corner is by now no longer particularly original. Papert, who is "no Pollyanna about technology," joins a growing chorus as he enters all the important caveats. It has become popular, and it is sensible, to question the Clintonite hype that computer and Internet access for children will be a magic bullet, the cure (or most of the cure) for America's educational, social, and familial problems. Papert has been cautioning against facile technological "fixes" for education for a quarter of a century, and here he calls classroom hook-ups a "pitiful microstep toward real change." I have no doubt that he is right.

It is also routine to lament that, as Papert puts it, "profit-driven barons of software industry can have as much influence as they do on the minds and the culture of children." Anyone who surfs even briefly, or who visits one of the dizzying mega-computer stores that Papert likens to a "hangar," knows that a huge amount of what can be loaded onto a computer, or logged onto on the World Wide Web, has lowest-common-denominator appeal. Critics such as Neil Postman have warned that the logic of the market tends to work against precisely the decentralization and the diversity that new communication technologies seem to promise. The interactive potential of the medium may be great, but so are the pressures working to package it as a much more passive screen experience to a mass audience born and bred on television. Entertainment software encourages rote response. So does a great deal of "educational" software. Papert, whose previous work has focused on computers in schools, is acute on the unanticipated pedagogical impact of the new technology. Among the most striking effects of much of the software peddled to parents as a stimulating learning experience has been to give a zippy-zappy new life to old-fashioned drill.

But Papert believes this kind of skepticism about the computer status quo is the beginning, not the end, of wisdom. His distinctive contribution is a wonky realism about what it would actually take to buck the tide, which he purveys in his gentle-guru style with lots of examples that he calls "learning stories." He means his book to be inspiring, and even a print-loving stick-in-the-mud is likely to get excited by his tips on realizing the potential for "truly interactive" use of the computer. The author of *Mindstorms: Children, Computers and Powerful Ideas* (1980) and *The Children's Machine: Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer* (1993), Papert is probably best known as a guiding force in the invention in the mid-1960s of Logo, a computer language that children come to learn by establishing a relationship of control over what he calls an "object-to-think-with" in the shape of a turtle. It gets rave reviews from many who have been in school settings sufficiently well-equipped to make the most of it (though Papert acknowledges that "perhaps half the schools who ever used Logo have dropped it for easier and more conservative uses of computers").

Logo enables children to do programming, that is, to issue directions to creations on the screen, rather than merely respond to directions themselves, in "answering machine" style. Papert believes that putting children in control of a "microworld, a little world of things that live and perform actions on the screen," realizes the full meaning of interactivity, and in turn "enhances their learning of everything else." In his game, "My Make Believe Castle," included on the CD-ROM that accompanies his book, a child can make various images—a knight, a princess, a dragon—move according to scenarios of his or her own devising. (The demo is only an incomplete sample, and therefore hard to assess.) Papert offers other and better "constructionist" examples, and points out the more conventional educational uses served by the approach. A seventh-grader, programming a computer to produce concrete poetry, suddenly understands the purpose of nouns and verbs, where grammar had previously seemed meaningless to her. Making a video game, a kid not only learns programming techniques, but also thinks about shapes and numbers. A fourth-grader figures out how to make colors on her screen "flash with an attractive scintillation," and is upset when her classmates copy her; a discussion of ownership of ideas ensues.

Papert's goal is to resist, whenever and however possible, the tendency toward "functional opacity" that makes us mere operators, rather than active explorers, of our technology and deprives us of a crucial learning experience: watching our brains work on figuring out how other things work. Just as he opposes the ingrained "instructionist" bias in schools, Papert rejects the modernist view of computers as mechanistic and rule-driven. Instead he hails them as a model of the "bricolage" approach of uninhibited, "constructionist," intuitive trial-and-error that most children favor. Papert has a preferred theory of knowledge. He contrasts the "bricoleur" who tinkers and "debugs" with the "planner," whose more hierarchical "learning style" is one that, in general, adults (though not he, a born tinkerer) are likely to favor. Papert believes that working with computers can help grownups question their (hierarchical) assumption that their way of thinking is superior. It also can help children acquire a new degree of sophisticated self-consciousness about their creatively meandering method. For Papert, the central definition of an effective "learning style" is one that is aware of itself as a style.

If this starts to sound a little Dewey-eyed, Papert's epistemological position looks considerably more rigorous in the lengthier account that he works through in *Mindstorms*. There he dons his Piagetian cap and addresses an audience that he assumes is ready for a more conceptually demanding primer. Far from peddling a soft or romantic or primitivist vision, Papert the mathematician makes the case for using computers to help reshape the "learning environments" of children conceived as "active builders of their own intellectual structures." With computers, Papert argues in *Mindstorms*, it is possible to approach what Piaget viewed as "formal" thinking, the abstract kind that he assigned to the teenage years, in a concrete way—and still have

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"those elements one needs to become a formal thinker."

Developing a program, as Papert shows with examples mostly from math and physics, is about trying to describe a process, which is itself a process of figuring out how to understand and to analyze. Both endeavors unfold by correcting mistakes as you proceed on a structural quest toward a goal. This model of acquiring knowledge is not a strict matter of "getting it" or "getting it wrong," but of "getting to know it," which can be an experience that conveys more meaning to the learner. The account of bricolage in *Mindstorms* is anything but fuzzy. What Papert values is the methodological thoroughness and self-scrutiny that the approach encourages. "In our culture," he laments, "systematic procedure is poorly represented," and such active and creative computer programming can help fill the gap.

That the vision in *The Connected Family* has become blurrier is partly a matter of popularizing and partly of course-correction. Papert, as he would say, is "debugging" an account that, as he wrote in the introduction to the second edition of *Mindstorms*, seemed to give too much "prominence to structured programming as a model for thinking about thinking." This time, as he works to dispel any impression that "structured, analytic thinking [is] synonymous with good thinking," he errs in the opposite direction. This is both reassuring and unsettling: Papert is more rigorous about thinking than he sounds in *The Connected Family*, but he has also succumbed to more of the dumbed-down, unstructured, click-mongering style of commercial computer culture than he did in *Mindstorms*.

Still, Papert's distinctive and demanding emphasis remains clear. He urges programming that is designed not just to accommodate, but also to make more articulate, different ways of pursuing knowledge; and he aims to encourage not just autonomy but also mastery. Those are educational goals that you can endorse without being a progressive purist. Nor do you have to feel that independence, idiosyncratic exploration, or creative interdependence between young and old are as woefully absent from home and school as Papert does to want to promote more of all three, and to applaud the use of computers to help.

It all sounds, in short, like very wholesome fun. Yet it is also much harder work than Papert lets on. His optimism about the computer future can't help being undermined by his pessimism about present and past "learning cultures," as he calls them. He admits in passing that there is an ahistorical tension in his high hopes for the computers-in-schools movement, given his bleak account of the deep-seated resistance to educational change in America. If Dewey and Piaget had as little lasting impact as he says they did, why should he fare any better? And Papert's eventual goal is not a modest one: the overthrow of the kind of stultified three-Rs curriculum he disdains, with long-term interdisciplinary projects as the focus of learning put in its place. He believes in striving for a balance between the kind of focused exploration encouraged by the microworld and the more random browsing encouraged by the "hyperworld" of the World Wide Web. He sets the homefront challenge similarly high: where dull-eyed TV-watching stupor once prevailed, soon lively communal clicking and family discussion of learning strategies will flourish.

Papert's radicalism is mostly rhetorical decoration in this how-to book. What really makes his ideas seem like an impossibly tall order is his close-to-the-screen practicality. Even if you are fortunate enough to start from a conducive learning culture, the road that Papert lays out to realizing his vision of truly interactive computer use looks daunting indeed. As I click away with my son, who is deprived of mindless CD-ROM games, I am struck by the prosaic and pervasive obstacles to meeting Papert's standards. And I'm not alone, as I learn when I visit a computer teacher at a Washington, D.C. private school that has only recently been equipped with computers. She is not finding it easy to incorporate them well into a setting that Papert might be expected to like, in which Deweyite learning-by-doing thrives in the lower grades and creative independence is fostered among the older children. In fact, Papert's natural audience of earnest Spockians, with pliably progressive bones still in their bodies, may be especially well-positioned to recognize just how demanding his agenda actually is. The problem is not technophobia—the attitude that "anything technological is an unintelligible black box." The problem is much less grand. Papert's vision is simply too time consuming, and it requires real, sustained concentration. Yet uninterrupted time and patience are precisely what neither our society nor our technology shows, well, much patience for.

Those who need Papert most are least likely to be converts. It is bustling parents and overburdened teachers who can be counted on to avail themselves of the opportunity to park the kids in front of the screen and slip in the most TV-like junk. What would be most useful in inner-city classrooms, which is where America's immediate education crisis lies, is a kind of guidance that Papert, generous liberal though he is, does not condescend to give. He points out that it is very hard to discern quality among the mountains of drill-like "instructing" software, much of it packaged dishonestly ("such fun your child won't know she is learning"); but he offers no help in steering parents and teachers toward the best programs for solidifying the three Rs. True, it would be wonderful if Papert's students could descend upon hard-pressed schools all over the country, as he reports that they did on a Boston school, and get children excitedly designing their own version of commercial educational software. But surely there is also at least a peripheral role, albeit a less imaginative one, for the mere machines, equipped with solid rather than glitzy back-to-basics software.

The truth is, Papert can't even preach very effectively to those who are already converted. Attentive parents and creative teachers are likely to feel that they are ill-equipped to give computers the kind of sustained and thoughtful focus that Papert requires, because they are too busy doing other wholesome, thought-provoking things with their children. I abandoned the baseball Web collage idea not because we are a family of couch potatoes, but in part because we are too busy nurturing in other ways (and in a fine Spockian manner) my son's new obsession with baseball.

The computer teacher in that private school has to make do with a mere twenty-six minutes per class per week, since the main classroom teachers feel that they need every moment they can seize to cover their own material. And they mean the sort of stuff that Papert would love: at this school, when children study Native Americans, they weave baskets and invent their own creation myths. So unless a particular teacher is interested in some specific computer link-up (one class is arranging e-mail and video communication with an Indian reservation), the computer teacher can do little more than what Papert, and she, agree is hardly ideal: introduce the children to office skills that will soon be obsolete, do some touch-typing practice, talk about computer ethics and safety (what *not* to do on the Internet), let them get comfortable by fooling around with KidPix. Why waste twenty-six minutes of schooltime on this, you might well ask.

Some of the difficulties the computer teacher has encountered are ironic evidence that Papert's "progressive"

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computers and his curious, autonomous children may not mirror each other and mesh quite as seamlessly as advertised. This teacher admires and has taught Logo. Yet she explains that it is not merely too time consuming to use constructively, but it would also be, of all things, too "rule-driven" to suit the progressive-minded kindergarten teachers of the school. The computer teacher also points out an unexpected problem in giving long-term independent computer projects to these pedagogically pampered elementary-school-age kids: they are so accustomed to ready feedback and constant interaction with their teachers that they do not always handle well the frustration involved in solitary trial-and-error pursuits on the screen. A different problem has presented itself as the school, now wired for the Internet, debates a policy on how to oversee its use. The older kids are trusted to pursue their projects on their own, and the lack of oversight spelled trouble when the students first started surfing. Meandering through the Web researching *Romeo and Juliet*, one girl unwittingly arrived at a porn site. Internet access was blocked while the faculty conferred.

These ironies point to the paradox inherent in the computer medium itself. The trial-and-error method on which it operates requires speed from the machine, but it requires the opposite from the user. The method demands lots of time and patience, but those are qualities that the medium tends to undercut. (Or else, as progressive educators know, the trial-and-error approach calls for plenty of unobtrusive guidance, which it takes a deeply attentive teacher to provide.) It is generally more efficient (which is not to say more rewarding) to learn things by trying to apply rules than by amassing experience, by planning as well as tinkering. This is true even now that wider and wider experience is made more speedily available thanks to the power of computers to generate (as Papert says) endless "feedback from reality." In fact, the more information there is to navigate, the longer it will take to feel prepared, say, to put together that *Romeo and Juliet* project.

At the conceptual level, a sense of frustration mounts; the lack of closure (and, inevitably, the interruptions) invites edgy distraction, and undermines concentration. Papert's ideal—everybody's ideal—is that the journey in quest of knowledge, and not just the arrival, feel like an absorbing, continuous experience. But the unhurried attentiveness that is required for that ideal is made harder by the accelerating technology. A medium that has taught us to expect immediate give-and-take, instant stimulus-and-response, delivers long finger-drumming pauses that seem longer because we are primed for speed. There is nothing nourishing or productive about these pauses. They are just "down time," a brief absence of experience, which disturbs the kind of expectant, ruminative calm that real learning requires. Papert lavishly praises children for their uninhibited willingness to make mistakes, but he doesn't honor children for their wide reservoirs of patience. He is right not to.

The obvious analogy, for skeptics, is television. It was breathlessly welcomed half a century ago for its power "to inform, educate and entertain an entire nation with a magical speed and vividness" (as Paul Porter, the FCC chairman, put it in 1945). Its power to inculcate precisely the kind of passive screen attitude that Papert aims to combat was not foreseen. Papert blames school for encouraging unimaginative receptivity, but surely television is the greater villain, for it rewards passivity not with boredom but with ever more hepped-up activity on the screen. Papert underrates the bad screen habits that we will need to break, and he overrates the power of the screen itself to do the job. (Can you really fight a screen with a screen?) In fact, what he values most in interacting with computers is the kind of experience that comes from the least screen-like form of entertainment: construction toys. The Lego professor lives up to his title. He extols such building material as the kind of activity that encourages the "creative intellectual style that favors flow and openness" that he wants computers to foster.

Papert's book is likely to have an influence quite different from the one he hopes for. Parents anxiously consult Spock-like books to keep up with the latest wisdom. But they are also seeking, even if they don't admit it, to take away a more comforting message: that they can carry on more or less as usual, without missing out on much of real importance. The child-centered lobby for the sort of school and home computer use that Papert endorses will probably feel justified by his book in being what they more naturally are: cyberturtles, persuaded that the race is not won by rushing. It is discouraging to feel that so many forces seem to be working against Papert's ways of proceeding; but it is encouraging to learn that his conceptual goals are well served by plenty of pre-video pastimes. It is also encouraging to learn that there is little reason to panic about ensuring early "computer literacy" in the sense that is usually meant: technical facility with an opaque machine. After all, even we dense adults are catching on without too much trouble. It can be fun, as some of us are finding; but mainly it is simply useful.

Flow, and openness, and usefulness: such qualities suggest another, better analogy than television for the computer that we are all learning to live with. Almost a century ago when cars were changing the world, they were considered the killers, the corrupters, *and* the liberators of children. Cars augured a new family isolation *and* new possibilities for community and mobility. There were always some kids with their heads under the hood, poking around metal innards that used to be much more "transparent" than they are now. (Papert, not surprisingly, was one of those tinkerers.) There were always many more kids who, priding themselves on their quick reflexes, wanted above all to drive and be driven fast.

Computers enjoy a comparable catch-all reputation now. There are some kids who spend hours noodling with their ever more opaque software and navigating the outer reaches of the Web. There are many more kids who are inclined to take a less probing, more impatient approach. Parents and teachers are bound to be nervously ambivalent about their children's hands on the keys of this captivating new machine, which has the unnerving power to take us very far very fast. With Papert's voice in your ear, you know that you are not wrong to wish that the children would slow down, even as you and they wish that the computer would speed up. •

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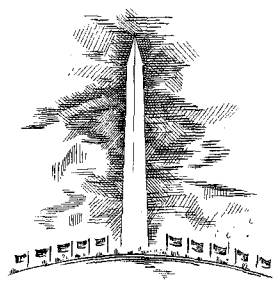
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Going postal

JUDGING BY TNR'S LETTERS TO THE editor, the two issues that rile our readers the most are the capital gains tax and capital punishment. The former makes sense to me. Our readers, many of them stockholders, have a personal interest in the fate of the capital gains tax. Yet personal interest alone can't explain this preoccupation; our demographic profiles suggest that very few of you face the prospect of imminent execution. In any case, whenever this magazine publishes something in favor of the capital gains tax—it's been *weeks* now—we face a torrent of hostile letters. We have always argued that capital gains income should be taxed exactly the same as ordinary income. The other side has always argued that capital gains shouldn't be taxed at all. At present we have a compromise: capital gains are taxed at half the rate of ordinary income. The next time the issue is debated, our side is going to be arguing to keep the capital gains tax as it is, and the other side is going to argue for eliminating it. If we keep splitting the difference, the capital gains tax will eventually approach zero. Our only chance of winning is to argue from a position of strength: people who earn profits from capital should have their assets confiscated. No, wait, that's not strong enough. They should get the death penalty.

THE ABOVE PARAGRAPH WAS DEsigned to provoke an angry response from Daniel Mitchell, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation whose sole apparent function is to monitor the print media for insufficiently obsequious references to the sanctity of capital gains and to respond angrily, always taking care to end his letters with a ringing endorsement of the flat tax. (Capital gains nuts are always flat tax nuts, too, since the flat tax doesn't tax income from capital gains.) Since Mitchell has no doubt already dropped his copy of this magazine and sprinted off to the nearest word processor, this is a good opportunity to warn any readers who might ever put their views in print that provocations far less direct than this will set off Mitchell's trip wire. Last summer he wrote to *Slate*, protesting an essay on feminism by Karen Lehrman. Lehrman's crime? She mentioned in passing that "feminism—like liberalism—requires equality of opportunity." Mitchell retorted that "it is ludicrous to apply that description to liberalism." Liberalism, he insisted, "props up our loophole-ridden tax system by opposing reforms such as"—yes—"the flat tax, that are based on treating all Americans equally." So, as Mitchell sees it, Lehrman should instead have written: "feminism—like liberalism, except for its maddening insistence on propping up our loophole-ridden tax system by opposing reforms, such as the flat tax, that are based on treating all Americans equally—requires equality of opportunity. . . ." Now that the debate is going Mitchell's way—Congress has cut the capital gains tax and is considering a flat tax—he is upping his ideological demands. Mere lack of disagreement will not satisfy him. We must actively affirm his position, even while discussing totally unrelated topics.



MITCHELL, I'M AFRAID, is not my only faithful correspondent. In addition to his missives, I continue to receive letters from an auto repair shop that once tried to swindle me. This shop replaced my transmission, but also changed all the FM settings on my car radio and overcharged me by several hundred dollars. Fortunately, I noticed the new radio settings and my insurance company noticed the overcharge. You would think that an auto shop caught in the act of gouging would at least face up to the fact that it had lost a customer. But no. It regularly sends me letters warning that its "records indicate" my car needs several repairs. I don't understand how records could possibly indicate this, as the state of my car could only be ascertained by inspecting it.

THIS ORDEAL BEGAN WHEN MY car fell into a pothole while creeping to a stop along a backstreet in Washington, D.C., cracking its transmission case. My insurance company's policy is to make the customer pay part of the cost of moving accidents (a highway crash) but not of nonmoving accidents (getting hit while waiting at a traffic light). My insurance agent insisted that the incident qualified as a moving accident, since the car was moving when it hit the pothole. She didn't seem to care that the only direction the car was moving was down. I asked if I would be forced to pay the deductible if, while my car sat in a garage, the ground opened up beneath it and it fell into the earth's crust. She confirmed that I would. I found this reassuring, in a way; I wasn't worried so much about the deductible as I was about the company possibly classifying the damage as a traffic accident, thus raising my premiums. The agent assured me that *l'affaire pothole* would not be considered a traffic accident. But in a few weeks, the insurance questionnaire arrived, and, sure enough, I had been lumped in with every other moving accident. For all the insurance company knew, I had attained a speed of 120 miles per hour before mowing down a troop of Girl Scouts. The questions all replicated the tone of a sneering bureaucrat, employing superficial deference to cover a presumption of guilt: How fast was the other party moving at the time of the accident? Well, zero miles an hour. Did the other party make a statement about the accident? No, potholes can't talk. Who, in your opinion, is responsible? I dunno. Mayor Barry?

THIS DIARIST IS creeping down its last column, and still no mention of the Greeks. It has been months since I last devoted this space to flattering the political sensibilities of Greece, and almost as long since the Greek embassy invited me to one of its lavish soirées. This is not a coincidence. In the intervening months, I have failed to reciprocate the taxpayers of Greece for a delicious breakfast—fluffy pancakes, pure maple syrup, fresh fruit—with their minister of culture. When I met with the minister of culture—a heavy-set man with a Greek-sounding name—he explained his purpose in inviting me: he wanted to build world opinion to force Britain to return the Elgin Marbles to Greece. The British, it seems, snatched the marbles from Greece during the Ottoman occupation. The gist of it, anyway, is that they've lost their marbles. The other journalists remained quiet throughout this speech—journalists like nothing better than free food, and we were concentrating on it—until at last somebody asked the minister how he liked his pancakes. Suddenly everyone spoke up, excitedly sharing stories of pancakes around the world. I could tell what the minister was thinking: he had flown across the world to impress upon a gathering of American opinion leaders the importance of his country's cultural treasures, and all they would remember was that he liked pancakes. Not me, though. What I remember is that the discussion conspicuously and awkwardly avoided any mention of the flat tax.

JONATHAN CHAIT

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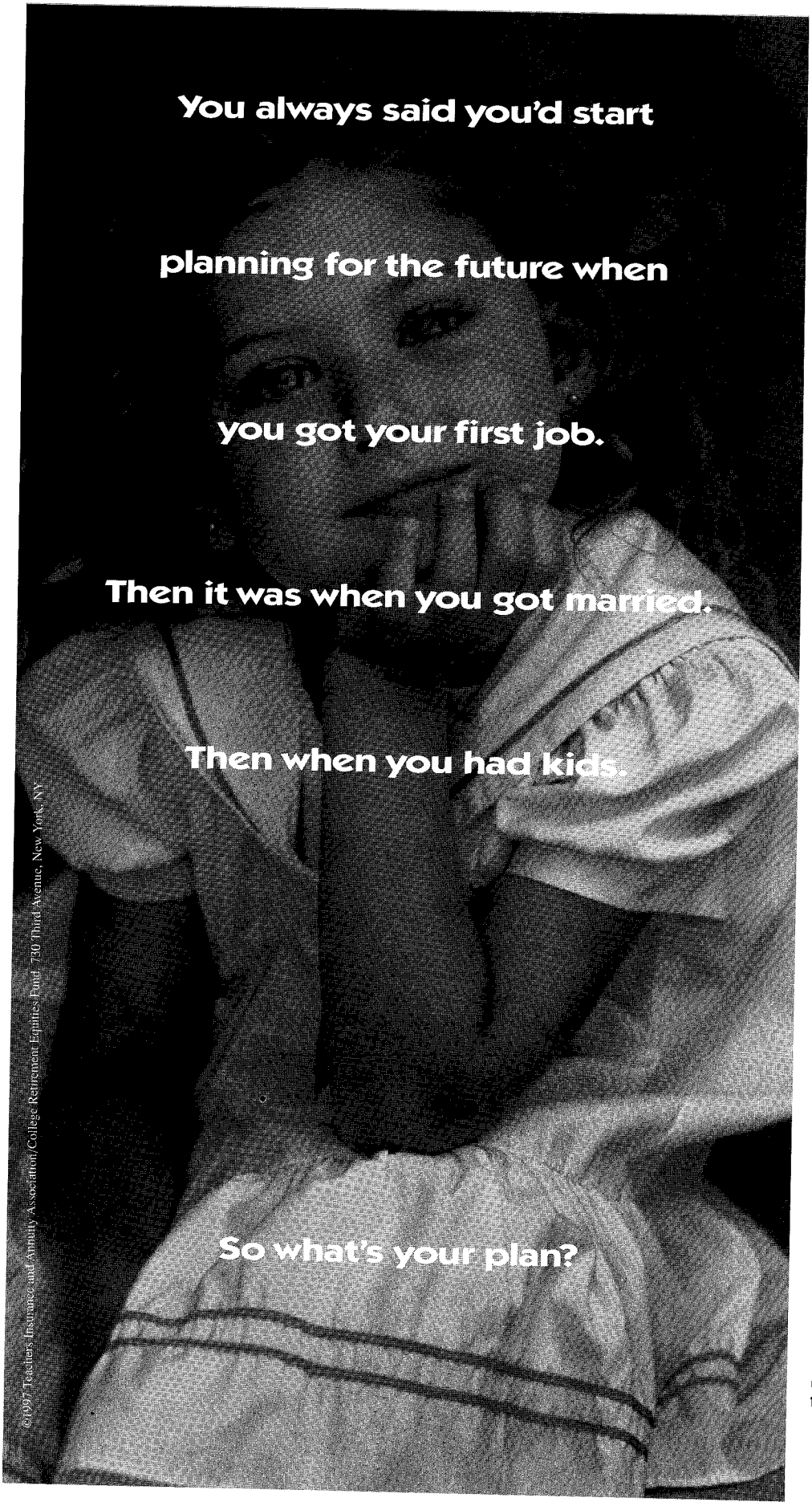
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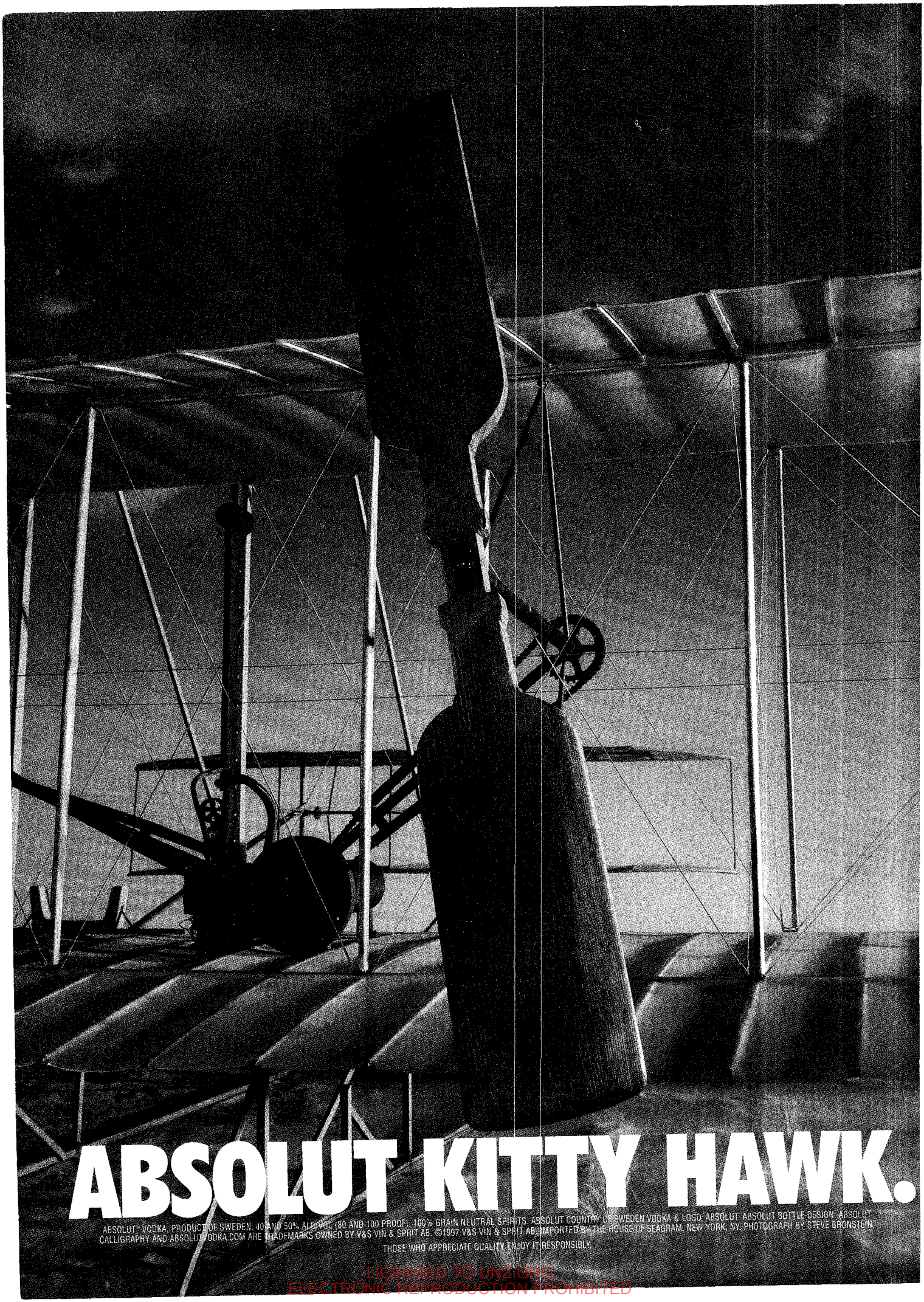

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